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ADVENTURE

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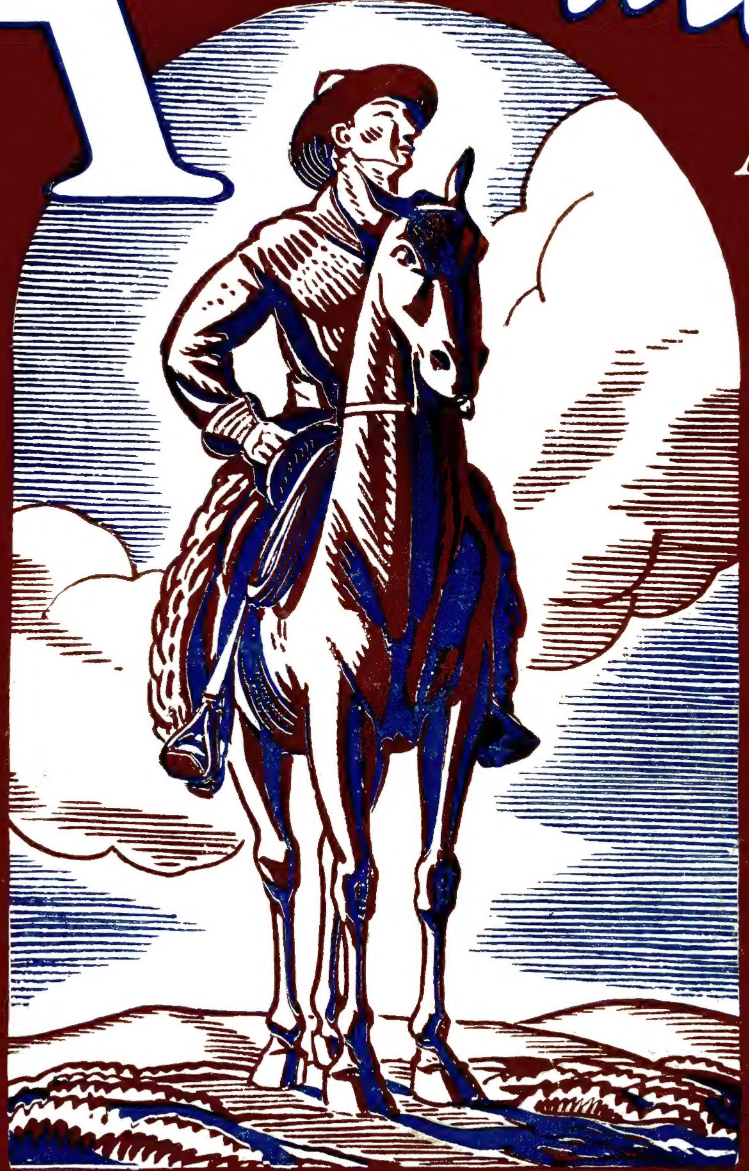
Adventure

May 15th



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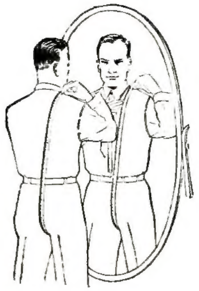

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1927

Vol. LXII No. 5

Arthur Sullivant Hoffman
EDITOR

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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The Mystery

"BUGS" Looks into Chinese Philosophy

IT WAS raining heavily upon the town of Mergui at the lower end of that strip of Burmese coast called Tenasserim. In Rangoon they said that it was always raining at Mergui—which was almost true—because the good Lord was trying to make the place clean, physically and morally. But Mergui retorted—that is, the young magistrate, the two clergymen and the three or four business men who made up the white population of that bit of the British Empire retorted—that the drab dirt of Mergui was better than the gilded filth of the capital of Lower Burma. But the tide was out and the rain beat into the mud and the six thousand or so alleged humans—Chinese and Malay mixtures, Burmans and unclassifiable creatures—sought surcease from bad weather in worse amusement.

In the shack that housed the goods of one of the leading Chinese merchants, a degenerate white man leaned drunkenly against the store counter and made demands of the stout proprietor in a tone which that tong leader seemed strangely to enjoy. At any rate, he smiled when the man who had once been white demanded this and that without payment, saying:

"Treat me right, Hip, and I'm your friend. You'll prosper and keep fat. Give me all the drink and opium I want and I'll keep my face shut. I don't want money—not much, anyway. But if you get snarly with me Gord help you! See—" he sprawled drunkenly—"now, I'm going out. Look like the rain was stopping."

The bland and smiling Chinese nodded as if to a dear relative, and the white man reeled away to the hut in which he lived—to the horror and disgust of the other whites. There he wrote a letter. Then he went out again. It had occurred to him that he needed a postage stamp.

"But maybe I'd better not ask Hip for it," he thought. "Don't want that dirty heathen to get suspicious. Ah, there's the *padre*. Decent sort that *padre*, but I wish he wouldn't worry about what he calls my soul."

The Reverend Father Murphy, two hundred and seventy pounds of kindly and sincere Catholic missionary, was ploughing his way through the reeking mud, trying to obtain the exercise between showers which the one doctor of Mergui deemed very needful. He saw Smithies, the degenerate white, and frowned; Smithies had badly strained the Christian charity of the Reverend Murphy.

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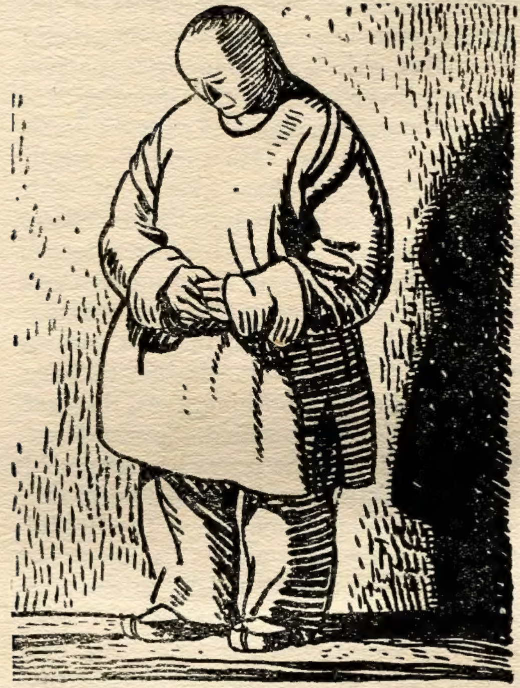
# of Mergui

By
S. B. H. HURST



"Afternoon, yer Reverence," Smithies leered. "You're looking fit."

"I wish I could say as much for you, Smithies," answered the *padre*. "Why don't you—?"

"Hold on, Father. I know what's coming, and I'm beginning to think you're right. But this is no place to brace up in, is it?" Smithies indicated Mergui vaguely with a shaking hand. "See, Father, here's a letter I've written to a friend in Australia. I've asked him to stop by here in his schooner next time he's up Burma way. He'll do it, too. You see, Father, if I get home again I may brace up. I can't do it here."

And he said this so simply and with such apparent sincerity that the doubting and much imposed upon clergyman did his best to believe him.

"And to show I'm on the square, sir—" Smithies seemed to plead with the hope of a better life—"to show I'm on the square about redeeming myself, I'll just ask you to put a stamp on this letter and mail it for me."

Father Murphy laughed—he couldn't help it.

"Your reasoning is beyond my mental grasping, Smithies," he said, "but I will mail the letter for you—unless you prefer that I give you the stamp and let you do it yourself?"

"I'll trust you, Father," Smithies grinned.

"And you will try to buck up, old man?" pleaded Father Murphy.

"Would I be telling my brother where I was, and asking him to come to me—and him one of the most respectable ship owners in Australia—if I didn't mean to reform?" said Smithies leeringly.

"Your brother?" asked Murphy. "I thought you said 'friend'?"

Smithies might have been a good actor; his tone became contrite.

"I let it slip," he said, "but I know you won't tell anybody that my brother has such a rotter as me for a brother, will you, sir?"

"Of course not," answered the stout Irishman. He patted Smithies heavily upon the shoulder. "And now I'll go and post this for you. Good-by."

He held out his hand, which Smithies shook, then went his somewhat ponderous way.

"Part truth," grinned Smithies to himself. "That letter's going to Australia, and there is schooners there. I think Bert Walmsley will be able to 'borrow' one of them when he reads my letter."

Next morning one of the Sikh policemen who, with ten of his kind, made up the staff of the youthful English magistrate, found the dead body of Smithies twisted into the mud, seaweed and piles of a decaying wharf. He had been knifed and thrown into the water. The tall Sikh contemplated the body gravely. Then he blew his whistle and another Sikh strode towards the wharf. They saluted with the dignity of rival field marshals. The Sikh who had blown the whistle pointed to the body of Smithies.

"The *chota budmash sahib* has received permission to depart," he said, pulling solemnly at his beard.

"With the aid of a common knife," responded the other with equal gravity.

"A knife that will carry no clue," added the first Sikh. "But go you, Pir Singh, and inform the magistrate sahib of this killing. I myself will stay here and guard the body against being touched or moved or in any way disturbed before examination, according to law."

The Sikh called Pir Singh saluted smartly, wheeled like a soldier on parade and marched away, not unlike a giant stork stalking through the mud of low tide. The Sikh who waited turned and surveyed Mergui with the contempt of a man of ancestry for a base-born mongrel. He sniffed delicately at the mingled odors of mud and débris, at the reek of low water, at the nose-insulting smells of the land waking to morning fires and the permeating perfume of that Burmese delicacy, *napi*, which is a species of fish, kept until it should be cremated, then pickled and again kept until it grows a halo—when it is eaten with ceremony.

And presently the young magistrate came with the doctor. The Sikh explained the matter of his finding the body, pointed to the knife and stood respectfully silent.

"What do you think, Pelham?" the magistrate asked the doctor, who had done nothing but puff vigorously at a Burmese cheroot of vast pungency.

"—— good—job," grunted the doctor between puffs.

"Eh?" asked the magistrate.

"Don't want to appear uncharitable, but that poor devil was better out—is better out than in, I mean. Somebody got tired of his begging—of his demanding, rather, and slipped him a ticket for hell. I told Murphy long ago that if Smithies bothered me as much as he did him I'd give him a big dose of prussic acid. But this was done by a native. Lord, my liver is mean this morning!"

The young magistrate had seen less death than the old doctor. He was quite upset.

"Yes, the poor chap was a bit of a nuisance," he said gently. "Poor fellow. Well, all we can do is to give him a decent burial. No use holding an inquest. Any one of five thousand natives or Chinese may have done this, and the best way to find out—if we ever do—is just to bury Smithies and say nothing. An inquest would only serve to shield the murderer. What church did the poor chap attend?"

The magistrate asked this with the careful attention to religion of the British official in India.

"Depended upon which missionary he thought he could get the most out of," answered the callous doctor. "Let one of your men send the *topasses* along. And maybe Murphy will say a few kind words —Smithies bothered Murphy more than anybody else, so the Irishman is the biggest gainer by this little matter of his being killed. Better keep the knife in your museum—never can tell what clue might turn up. I'm going to breakfast—have to cut off a chink's leg at ten. Good-by."

The doctor returned the salutes of the grave Sikhs, nodded to the magistrate and went to his breakfast. The sympathetic magistrate gave the necessary orders and went his way feeling sick.

And so, save for some little talk that day, Smithies passed from Mergui. For by afternoon the earth had received him. But Father Murphy paid for a headstone.

"The poor chap was expecting his brother from Australia," said the priest simply. "I wouldn't want his brother's feelings to be hurt by finding we had just dumped Smithies into the earth without a word of remembrance."

The magistrate agreed; the doctor sneered.

THE weeks passed until there came to Mergui what was known as "the cold weather"—a delectable period during which, just before dawn, a man might sleep under a single blanket without sweating. It was the period of the year when Father Murphy visited his far-flung converts, and he departed in a groaning bullock cart with the good wishes of his friends and some excellent things to eat and drink during his pilgrimage.

Late next afternoon, with the wind making into a gale across the Gulf, a harried schooner beat its way into the safety of Mergui harbor. The doctor, who was dressing for dinner when the anchor dropped, sent his native servant aboard.

"Supposed to go myself," he grunted, "but I'm —— if I do. Now if that chap has small pox or pip or housemaid's knee or anything aboard him, I'll hear about it in time—they'll die anyway in this stinking, infected hole." He told his servant, "Go, Isman Ali, and ask the captain sahib on that schooner the questions I told you to ask. If he says no to most of them, tell him he can come on shore."

The servant did as he was bidden and, later, after dark, two men came ashore from the schooner. They were hard looking men—men who did not seek the hospitality of the club, where all the whites foregathered. Instead, they went into the Chinese quarter and there bought drinks and talked as disinterested strangers might talk and ask questions in a strange town. About midnight they left the drink shop which was kept by a voluble half-caste—negro-Chinese.

The stars came out. Mergui grew chilly. The drunken music ceased, and the dull climax of an animal night in a little cesspool of the world died in the usual quarrels, these falling away into a sea of sleep which beat upon wakeful ears in waves of snoring.

It was about four in the morning when a weary Pir Singh heard the first pistol shot on the schooner. As he paused with his whistle at his lips, a veritable babel of yells and shots broke out—cursings and groans. The remainder of the little harbor woke to comment, but not to interference. But Pir Singh, while much offended, attended to duty.

So it came about that a harried magistrate in pyjamas, rowed by four very angry Sikhs, hastened to the schooner in the small police boat. In 1890 this was a clumsy gig. The fight on the schooner had developed into a guerrilla war—men firing at one another from behind hiding places—but as the police boat surged toward the conflict it burst again into rapid action, as if the combatants realized that it was best to finish before the law came alongside. Screams, shots and what the poet called "monstrous blasphemies." Then one long-drawn yell, followed by tired but derisive laughter. The splash of several bodies diving from the schooner's rail. The ripple of their almost silent swimming. On the schooner, the heavy quiet of death.

"*Tano,* men—pull," panted the magistrate unnecessarily to his straining police.

"Get me on board. No use to try to catch those swimmers; they are going in all directions."

The boat swirled alongside the schooner; the magistrate and three of his men scrambled over the low rail. Electricity was in its infancy, but the police carried bull's-eye lanterns. The lanterns gleamed nastily on what might have been an abattoir in some cannibal country.

"My God!" groaned the horrified young magistrate.

The senior policeman tried to console his chief.

"*Couch per wanee, burra sahib,*" he said respectfully. "Never mind, the world is easier, for hell has been fed. *Couch per wanee, burra sahib.*"

"But all this in my district," groaned the magistrate. "What will my chief say in Rangoon?"

He suddenly realized that he was committing the unforgivable sin for a sahib—breaking down before "natives." He bit his trembling lips and got hold of himself. After all, he was only twenty-two.

"I only got back to town about midnight. When did this schooner get in?"

The senior policeman answered.

"We will go below and look at her papers," said the magistrate. "Before dawn, have *topasses* here to carry the bodies ashore. We can do nothing at this moment."

The policeman saluted, set a guard—for of course the Sikhs would not handle the dead when there were others to do it—and went below with the magistrate. But although both men searched every nook and corner of the cabin not a vestige of ship's papers did they discover.

"Four dead white men and seven dead Chinese on the schooner's deck, the name obliterated on her bows and no papers. What does it mean? Tell me, Ruttan Singh, what does it mean?"

"Thieves, sahib," answered Ruttan Singh.

"We have no customs inspection here for incoming vessels," muttered the magistrate.

"How could we have when little dhows and schooners flit in and out like shadows at all hours. But all those have at least some papers of identification. The doctor said there was no sickness on board, but it's a jest to talk about barring disease from a place like Mergui. Thieves, did you say thieves, Sergeant?"

"Ah, sahib. Thieves stole this schooner, came here, met other thieves. They fight and—" Ruttan Singh waved a large, hairy and eloquent hand.

"So, and no doubt you are right. But we can do nothing here. Leave a double guard, and the *topasses* shall bring the bodies ashore in the morning. We should at least be able to identify the Chinese."

The magistrate went ashore and back to bed to try for sleep. He did doze for a few moments before his servant woke him, saying that the police sergeant wanted to speak on important matters.

"Bring him in," said the weary magistrate apprehensively.

Ruttan Singh came in. He saluted gravely.

"We have just found two more dead white men in a street where there are no occupied houses near, sahib," said the policeman.

"What!" the magistrate sat up on his cot. Back of his mind a demon was asking him why he had been such a fool as to come to such a God-forsaken country. He suppressed the demon. "All right, Ruttan Singh. Wait while I dress," said the magistrate firmly.

The policeman saluted and retired to wait.

SUCH a wholesale slaying of white men was, to the mongrel population of Mergui, a cheerful entertainment, a sort of interlude among less tragic amusements. The magistrate knew this, and planned to dampen the delight of the audience. He had only a few Sikhs and less than a dozen white men with him, but that made no difference. He dismissed the idea of asking Rangoon for help. At the mature age of twenty-two he felt, after the first sickening shock, that he needed no help. He, with his police, would clean up Mergui, bring the culprits to trial and be present at their hanging. It was the cynical doctor who first made him lose some of his enthusiasm.

"Why fuss?" asked that caustic disciple of Galen. "There's nothing in it. If you annoy Rangoon, my boy, some liverish senior like me will put it against you in your record, and some day when you are in line for promotion you will be sent to the Chin Hills or some —— place, while the other fellow of your seniority who handled things with more discretion will spend his last years of service in an arm chair in the club at Rangoon."

"But I don't intend to bother Rangoon," answered the boy.

"I know, but you will if you stir things up. Let it slide and report the exact truth, which is that a bunch of thieves stole a schooner—you may perhaps find out where they stole it—came in here, started trouble with some Chinese and got the worst of it. I am certain that that is what happened, and that that is all there is to it. Chinese never begin trouble—you know that. And it's crazy to cross-question the Chinese, as you think of doing, because a chink is constitutionally unable to speak the truth. There are fifteen hundred Chinese in Mergui town, and God knows how many more in the district. Imagine your state of mind after you have interrogated fifteen hundred chinks—with the killers a hundred miles up country by this afternoon—and you have listened to fifteen million assorted lies. I like you, young man, and don't want you to make a fool of yourself. Make a perfunctory examination, of course; then report the truth—as I have told it to you."

"I must ask the leading Chinese about it," protested the magistrate.

"In this country," answered the doctor, "the man who takes things easy lives the longest and retires to enjoy his pension—that's medical advice. And the young man who writes fewest letters to his chief and gives less trouble, does his job with least fuss, becomes the most popular and, *pari passu*, the most successful. And that's sound common sense. But I must be off. As coroner, I give you my opinion that the various corpses came to their ends suddenly and by violent but *not* accidental means. India, 'specially Burma, makes a man treat corpses as a poor mathematician treats figures—he tries to forget 'em. Good-by till tiffin."

"I will interview the six leading Chinese merchants," said the magistrate, "and I will order them to come to my office this morning."

The doctor laughed.

"All right. But the best of them—old Hip, whom Murphy and his rival of the Church of England both claim to have converted—to some weird branch of Chinese metaphysics invented and flavored with Christianity by Hip himself!—can't come. I have just finished dressing his fat feet. The old fool upset a lamp last night and tried to stamp out the flame in list slippers. Burned his feet badly. Be in bed ten days at least. Shall I take his depositions for you?"

The young man kept his temper.

"No thanks, Doctor, I'll attend to him myself. See you at lunch."

Questioning the leading Chinese brought just one answer—an answer that tended to confirm the doctor's opinion. The dead Chinese were *futow jais*,* whose business it was to hire out for anything from stealing to murder and who, when jobs were scarce, operated on their own. Chinese merchants who were not on speaking terms, who belonged to rival tongs, all made this statement without quibble or reservation and advanced the opinion that the white men got drunk and started just what the hatchet men were looking for. These Chinese merchants were honest business men—there was no doubt of that—and, being of rival tongs, could have no reason for shielding any one if they suspected any one behind the actual killers.

The magistrate could see no evidence of concealment, no wish to delude him. Every Chinaman he interrogated, separately and alone, seemed genuinely glad that so many hatchet men had been killed and that the other members of that gang had fled the town. No doubt they had all employed these men at different times, and could spare their continued living.

Hip, who was hated by his trade brethren, when visited, sat up in bed and confirmed everything these trade rivals had said. As the doctor had declared, some white adventurers—to give them the most decent name which would describe them—had apparently stolen the schooner, had come to Mergui in the gale seeking further stealings—the schooner was bare of provisions—had mixed with the bad Chinese, quarreled. And the Sikh police were of the same opinion as the doctor. So it ended with the burial of the unknown white men, upon whom no scrap of paper or other identification was discovered, and the magistrate's report to Rangoon—confirming the doctor.

---

*Hatchet men.

It was likely, as he said, that the Chinese had robbed the bodies. He suggested that other ports be questioned as to missing schooners, reported stolen by their owners.

And there the matter would have ended for all time, if the bullock carts of the Reverend Father Murphy had not broken under too great a strain and the gentleman himself had not been compelled to return to Mergui for fresh conveyances. He was perspiring freely from even more walking than the doctor had ordered when he met the magistrate and listened to the news.

He shuddered at the horrible details, but his decision was firm.

"Well," he said, "if you think there is nothing more to this than you have reported to Rangoon—I don't. I am going to see this matter is investigated."

"It's hardly in your department, is it, Father?" retorted the offended magistrate.

"It might appear metaphysical to you if I tried to explain that it's more in my department than yours," answered Father Murphy, laying a soothing hand on the magistrate's shoulder. "When a man is dead you are done with him—he is out of your jurisdiction, but he is not out of mine."

"You mean you will pray for them."

"I will do that, and more than that."

"You will investigate yourself, eh? Well, of course, we all know that you can talk to the Chinese better than any of us—you may get a clue. But they seemed sincere with me."

"They probably were, but, as I said, a little investigation is in order."

The priest hesitated. The magistrate was a fool, but Murphy did not want to hurt his feelings. But neither did he wish to lose all chance of bringing the murderers to justice by telling the young man about what seemed to be a clue—a weak clue, maybe, but still a lead. He did some rapid thinking. He was an intimate friend of Lord Cameron, Governor of Burma, and he could write to that official without harming the youthful magistrate. He would do that. The big Irishman was a trifle impetuous, and this sometimes harried his sympathetic soul by chancing the harming of another man's position.

"Well, play detective, if you wish, Father, but I must ask you to report to me if you discover anything. I am the chief civil official here, remember."

"When it looks like you should act I will tell you," the priest said smiling.

"All right. Now I am going to bed—I'm tired. Good night," said the young man.

"I'm tired, too," said the priest. "I think I'll let my up-country converts mourn my absence until the roads get better, if they ever do. Walking does not agree with a middle-aged man of my build."

He was very tired, was the priest, but after a bath and a much heavier dinner than the doctor had advised he sat down and wrote this letter to the Governor of Burma:

My dear Lord Cameron:

I rather hesitate to take this upon myself, but since a poor chap gave me certain information just before he died —information which of course the magistrate of Mergui does not possess —I think it well to make the suggestion which follows, knowing it will not redound to the magistrate's disadvantage, since he could not possibly have this information and his report was based upon all the information he could possibly obtain.

The priest laid his pen down and read what he had written. He grinned.

"I'm Irish and a Jesuit," he muttered, "but if this letter did not imply that poor Smithies told me what he did in the confession box it would ruin our young magistrate. It hurts nobody to phrase my letter this way, and saves the reputation of our young man. And it's quite true that he could not possibly have gotten the information, because Smithies borrowed a stamp from me, not from the magistrate—something official Rangoon might not understand."

He chuckled and wrote:

> *This information, used post-mortem as a hint to any investigator you may wish to send to Mergui to look into this schooner business, may lead to something definite. I trust you will send a man.*

He then filled a page with friendly gossip, but all gently urging a man be sent to Mergui. Then he groaned, but, nevertheless, walked to the postoffice and mailed the letter himself.

In due time he received a jocular letter from Cameron who, although a member of another church, greatly admired the stout priest, saying that when a good man could be spared he would send one. There were no detectives in Burma, but a Secret Service man might be spared. As the S.S. was very busy, chiefly in the dacoit hunting line, it might be a little while before one of them arrived in Mergui.

A week passed, then another. Knowing something about the number of dacoits in Burma, the size and impassable districts of the country, Father Murphy began to despair of ever seeing a Secret Service man in Mergui.

"It will be one of their grandsons who will get here," he grinned, "because it will take years to catch all the dacoits. And when that grandson of a Secret Service man arrives I won't be here, and the schooner will be forgotten and our young magistrate will be ninety and—"

He walked to his tiny church. The native janitor had finished cleaning up, and the place seemed empty. But as Murphy looked pridefully about the neat little building he himself had planned, the morning sunlight came under the arm of John the Baptist, through the one stained glass window of the church, and flickered upon the most disreputable white man Murphy had ever seen in Burma—which was saying a lot. The defunct Smithies had been a dude by comparison. And what made this tramp seem worse was a monocle in his right eye which flickered among his terrible whiskers like a defiant heliograph just visible in a rank forest.

Very often in his kindly career had Father Murphy found outcasts in his church—bits of humanity which civilization could not digest. Men, maybe, of alien sects but who drifted into the church as tired children might turn to a kindly woman for comfort. That many of these had accepted Murphy's help, if not his faith, and then failed in any sort of gratitude made no difference to the kindly priest. And so he walked down the aisle to where the derelict sat.

"I am about to have breakfast," said the priest simply. "Will you join me?"

The tramp opened his eyes. He adjusted the monocle more firmly. He regarded the priest gravely.

"Glad to," he said with the accent of Oxford University.

He stood up and held out his hand. He smiled slightly.

"I would be glad to breakfast with you, Father," he said, "but for reasons you will soon understand it may be best we are not seen too much together. I came in here to have the pleasure of meeting you, and to ask you what information regarding the schooner killings you spoke of in your letter to Cameron."

For once Murphy's easy flow of language and Irish wit was frozen. He gazed, open-mouthed, at the awful specimen of humanity who spoke with such familiarity of Lord Cameron, whom even the Viceroy of India treated with deference. Then his mind grasped the significance of the reference to the schooner killings. So this was the Secret Service man. The disreputable appearance was a disguise!

The tramp was saying:

"I must introduce myself, Father. My name is Sinnat, Secret Service. When we were at school Cameron nicknamed me 'Bugs' in revenge for my calling him 'Pickhead.' If you wish you may call me Bugs—my friends all do. I use this costume—lack of it, rather—in my work, but it is necessary to have a confidant in Mergui and, besides, you have information for me. But to the rest of the world I am a low-down tramp. So our meetings must not be conspicuous."

"Ah," gasped Murphy.

"And what is the information?" asked Bugs.

"Well—" Murphy hesitated. Somehow this strange mortal made the priest's clue seem very weak indeed. "Well, the day before he was killed Smithies had me post a letter to his brother, a well known ship owner in Australia, he said, in which he claimed to have asked his brother to come to Mergui and take him home—so he could brace up. Then a schooner came here—and you know about the killings."

"Tell me about Smithies, please."

The priest complied.

"And you have nothing more definite?"

"Nothing, I am sorry to say. And it seems now that, logically, my information is of no value, but I feel intuitively certain that there is a connection between the killing of Smithies and the killings of the schooner."

Bugs did not smile when the stout priest emphasized his opinion by striking himself vigorously on his broad chest. He merely said:

"I will look into it. And I am something of a believer in intuition myself—have seen some remarkable results of it. Now I must go, Father, and believe me I am much obliged to you."

In this manner did Horace Sinnat, Indian Secret Service, 006 Domestic, come to Mergui. He went out into the glare of a sunny Mergui morning, walked down to one of the old wharves, filled and lighted a dirty looking pipe, and talked to himself:

"Assuming the priest is correct—that there is a connection between Smithies and the schooner. First, why was Smithies killed? Not because he was a bum and owed money. No, because some one was afraid of him. Seems absurd, but it's logical. For the big thing behind all this is the reason for the killings, provided there is one—provided that they were not the mere result of drunken rows. No, I can not reason it out. I need more facts, and they are going to be hard to get. I must hang around this dirty hole till I get the facts."

LATER he again met Murphy in the church.

"At the time of the killing of Smithies and after the schooner killings, were there any wounded natives or Chinese discovered?" he asked.

"None," said the priest positively. "Nothing like that. One of the most decent Chinese burned his feet putting out the flame of a lamp he had dropped, the doctor told me about it, but that could have nothing to do with the murders, even if Hip, the injured man, was not about the decentest Chinese I ever met—and I know many very fine ones. You ought to know Hip—he is quite a philosopher. And if you talk to him you will learn more of Mergui and its people than you could learn anywhere else."

"I may have to become friends with as many Merguians as will tolerate my dismal appearance," grinned Bugs. "But I wish I could get track of a badly damaged chink. Treading out flames, while foolish, is just what a middle-aged Chinese would do. And it's a long way from a schooner fight. No, I want a man with a bullet in his system, or a knife wound. I know how to make such people talk—which is an art when one is dealing with Orientals."

Bugs left the church again.

"Darn the case!" he muttered. "Seems to be nothing in it. Those thugs stole the schooner, came here for more stealing. Smithies' brother, if he has one, is probably too darned glad to have Smithies far away to come after him."

The smell of Mergui rose heavily. It might have been the incense burned by a sarcastic hades rising toward an offended heaven.

"That philosophical chink with the burned feet. The *padre* said he would be a source of information. I will cultivate him, although I should not be surprized if it turned out that there is nothing to this business but drink and nastiness.'

So Bugs loafed into the heterogeneous store of Hip Ah Sing. It was smellier than

Mergui, impossible as such a degree of stink seems. The fat Hip sat behind his counter, alone. When he saw Bugs he smiled.

"Glood mornling," he beamed.

"Good morning," answered Bugs. "I, friend of heaven, am a seeker for the highest, and my search has taken me far abroad the world. I have heard you spoken of as a friend of philosophy. On my journey I honored myself and my fathers by allowing my unworthy feet to pass your benevolent doorstep."

Hip beamed now like a Buddha. He might well do so, for Bugs had spoken in the most fluent mandarin Chinese. He got up quickly for one so fat, and waddled around his counter to Bugs. He bowed deeply, if somewhat comically, because of his waist—or lack of it.

"My house is yours," he said simply.

So Bugs talked philosophy to Hip, for many days. Between discussions concerning the Loatze conception of the vacuum as the Highest, and Confucian ethics, the Secret Service man learned much about the Chinese population of Mergui, but not a word of information did he glean regarding the killing of Smithies and the men of the schooner—about which he, naturally, did not speak. More and more did he believe there was no relation between the two murders. For there was no longer any doubt in his mind that the schooner people were mere thieves, among whom was no man willing to save his brother from dipsomania. And then, behind it all was the question: Why the killings, unless they were but the result of drunken quarrels? Was there anything behind them?

Came a night when Hip did not appear interested in philosophy. Polite as ever, he spoke of feeling tired and unwell, and announced his determination to close his store early. The courteous Bugs could only sympathize and leave.

"Queer old chap," he thought, "but, as Murphy says, very decent."

Seeing a light in the church, Bugs entered. Murphy saw him and came down the empty aisle.

"Do you know," said the priest, "I worry about you. Mergui hasn't had a killing for some weeks. Murders come in cycles here, and killing white men seems fashionable. Look out for yourself, won't you?"

Bugs, who had wandered through the worst parts of Burma, hundreds of miles from other white men, whose entire life was danger successfully dodged, smiled.

He indicated his left armpit.

"I carry six dead men there," he said.

"What!" exclaimed the startled priest.

"My gun," explained Bugs. Father Murphy laughed.

"I was somewhat dense," he said. "But all the same, be careful. I feel responsible, you know, having been the cause of your coming here."

"I am always very careful," answered Bugs gravely.

He left the church, walking aimlessly. Passing the store of Hip the philosopher, he was surprized to see the door open—it seemed, cautiously—a momentary light, then a Malay type of man coming out with a sack on his shoulder. Bugs sought cover instinctively. Then he followed the Malay with the caution of a tiger and the invisibility of a ghost.

"Some harmless business of friend Hip's," he muttered. "Perhaps illegal—there is a tax on opium. But none of my affair. However, there's nothing else to do so I'll follow this brown man with the sack—keep me in practise."

He followed the brown man down to the dank and deserted part of the waterfront that used to annoy the whites so much. They claimed the government should fill in the mud and build a decent wharf there, since even the native boats shunned the place. Eventually a wharf of stone was built there, but that was many years after the night Bugs followed the brown man.

There was no moon, but a few stars enabled Bugs to see a solitary boat moored above the mud of low water.

"One of those craft which a friend of mine who is given to a low form of language calls 'an androgynous catamaran,' " muttered Bugs. "Likely the brown man is a Selung—one of that mixture of fragments of forgotten people who live across the water a hundred miles or so among those weird geological specimens called the Mergui Archipelago. What does he do with friend Hip? Answer very simple, perhaps. Can't grow rice on islands ten feet square and six hundred feet high. Like trying to cultivate Cleopatra's needle. So the Selung comes to Mergui to buy rice et cetera from Hip, who makes a living selling such things. Yet why should Hip feign sickness? To get rid of me? Maybe. But, again, he might not have expected the Selung visitor, and got up and sold him rice because the visitor wished to leave on the next tide. Let's watch."

He watched the Selung stow away his sack, then stand against the faint light, looking about. Then he jumped nimbly ashore again, and went up town.

"More rice, eh?" thought Bugs. "While he is gone I will investigate."

He went on board the boat and examined the sack. It contained rice. Bugs sat down on it.

Next day Bugs was missing from Mergui. Father Murphy worried but said nothing. But when day followed day without a sign of Bugs or a word from him the worthy man of intuitions could no longer contain himself. He sent a hurried telegram to Lord Cameron, couched in a code all his own:

NO BUGS IN MERGUI. FEAR FOR ENTOMOLOGIST. PLEASE.

Came the reply from the governor.

BUGS MISSING EVER SINCE I HAVE KNOWN THE ANIMAL—TWENTY ODD YEARS. DON'T BE ALARMED, HE IS SOMETHING OF AN IMMORTAL.

AND one morning, two weeks later, Father Murphy found the Secret Service man in his church again.

"You were right," said Bugs, when the stout priest had expressed his delight. "You were right—intuition wins, like a light thrown in a dark corner. In this case, a very dark and very nasty corner. There *was* a connection between the killing of Smithies and the schooner and that letter, as you supposed."

"You have found out all about it?" gasped Murphy.

"Yes," said Bugs rather wearily. "This Service leads one into beastly situations. Tonight you shall know more. Now I will entertain you with an account of that little known race, the Selungs, who inhabit somewhat sparsely the islands of the archipelago. They tried to keep me there. Yes, my vast knowledge of some things—very ordinary knowledge, really—made them first hate me, then love me, then want me to be king. I might have let them crown me, too, but I thought Cameron might not like it. Still, King Bugs the First would have sounded awfully well! If you don't mind, I want you to introduce me to the young magistrate, who is also chief of police. It's sad, but I fear this disguise of mine is likely to become useless—so many people know about it—and to wear decent clothes again would be a terrible bore. Take me to the magistrate, please. Look stern, for I want Mergui to think you have caught me stealing something!"

They went along the street to the house of the magistrate, with the Merguians watching avidly. Bugs looked contrite; the priest did his best to look like offended justice.

"I want to see the *burra sahib*, alone," explained Father Murphy to a waiting Sikh. And when they were admitted, "This gentleman has something to tell you."

"I have something to tell him, too," the magistrate was annoyed. "And what I have to say is that unless he gets out of town and stops loafing around the Chinese quarter I will put him in jail. I'm sick of seeing his sort around Mergui, disgracing the white race."

"But," began the astonished priest, when a knock on the door interrupted.

"What is it?" asked the magistrate testily.

It was a Chinaman, who brought the

news that Hip, hearing his friend was in trouble, had sent the messenger with an offer of bail. Any amount of bail, because Hip knew his friend and trusted him.

Bugs turned his head, seemingly interested in the glittering water of the harbor. His chest heaved somewhat, as if he had been running.

"Bail!" exclaimed the magistrate. He looked at Bugs. "See, he is laughing—that's what we are coming to—a prisoner laughs at me, and his friends offer bail."

Bugs turned and faced the irate young man. Through the monocle gleamed an eye that pierced the magistrate's mental processes.

"I was *not* laughing," said Bugs, and the tone of his voice brought a curious silence into the office. "I was not laughing." He turned to the Chinaman, and spoke in Chinese. "I thank our learned Hip for the offer, but it is not needed. You may go."

The Chinaman bowed and went. The magistrate, who could not speak Chinese, asked—

"What did you tell that fellow?"

"If you would learn politeness you would know more," said Bugs.

"Tell me," stormed the magistrate, "or I'll call him back."

Bugs shrugged his shoulders. Murphy interposed.

He laid a fatherly hand on the magistrate's shoulder—a severely fatherly hand of large size and heavy dimensions. It might have been called a corrective hand—a slap. The young man winced.

"This gentleman," boomed Father Murphy, "belongs to the Secret Service of India. You may have heard of Mr. Sinnat?"

The magistrate had heard—who had not in Burma at that period?—but, like the vast majority, had never seen Bugs before. The Secret Service was then a power in the land, a power far above minor magistrates, partly because it was a wonderful body of indispensable men, and partly because it was the powerful right arm of Lord Cameron. The magistrate did not ask to see Bugs' credential. He apologized, and asked for orders.

"I only want you to put six of your Sikhs under my orders for tonight," said Bugs. "Tomorrow you may report to Rangoon that the mystery of the killing of Smithies and the schooner men is solved."

The magistrate stood up excitedly.

"But the murderers—where are they?" he asked.

"Within a hundred miles of this office," replied Bugs.

"But—but why not apprehend them now?"

"Because, as a dear friend of mine in New York would say, when catching a crook it is best to catch him with the goods. Then there are no alibis."

"But — a murderer — murderers — Surely, Mr. Sinnat, you don't mean to let them do another murder so as you can catch them at it?"

Bugs smiled wearily.

"Not exactly," he said. "But tomorrow you will know." He turned to Murphy. "Thanks, Father, for your kind help. Now I must leave you for a few hours. I want to talk to the Sikhs and arrange matters for this evening."

He left the office and went into the small jail with Ruttan Singh. He talked to that tall man for some time. The day passed as usual in Mergui, but Bugs was not seen about the streets.

With the eerie bats and huge moths of the muggy dark, Mergui woke to its pleasures of yeasting nastiness. And the hours passed this way until the tide of life reached its low level, between one and two in the morning. The usually scattered Sikh police had drawn together in one corner of the town, and now four of them waited unseen behind a shack avoided by the natives because haunted by the memory of a terrible crime. Even the proud men from the Punjaub felt shivery, but they would rather have died than admit this fear of the unseen. They felt happier when Bugs and Ruttan Singh came silently as shadows.

Bugs had explained to the sergeant.

"There may be a fight, but I am almost

certain there will not be. I want your men because I want quick and sudden action. Arm them with heavy axes; you and I will have our guns handy. But I doubt the need of guns."

He sighed like a very tired man, and Ruttan Singh had said:

"The sahib is weary. Let him go and take his rest then, this night, and my men and I will attend to this small business."

"No," Bugs had replied," I am not tired."

And now they waited in the dark, all silent, the Sikhs pawing their great beards, Bugs playing nervously with his monocle. But he was keenly watching a place where two streets intersected, where a man, passing, would be visible in that pale light for the space of seconds. Mergui had grown quiet, life and passion having ebbed. Bugs stared and stared. His eyes grew watery. He wiped them hurriedly.

"Hope the chap don't go astray," he muttered. "Ah—there! Now, men, follow me—quietly."

The Sikhs followed Bugs like tigers—huge, stealthy, fierce—Ruttan Singh careful to hold his place immediately behind Bugs, as was his right. Perhaps fifty yards. The man Bugs had seen was no longer visible. There was the sudden glow of a light, as from a door opened with caution.

"He has no suspicions," thought Bugs, "or he would have put the light out." Then in a whisper, "Go ahead, men, quickly!"

The Sikhs leaped forward, as tigers leap when the prey is within reach.

Their heavy axes rose and fell together. The wooden door fell before them. Bugs jumped over the débris, followed by the sergeant. Inside, Hip, the philosophical Chinaman, sat petrified by the suddenness of the coming of the police. A brown Selung stood by his side. Stunned for a second, then Hip made a hasty attempt to hide a small skin bag he had been opening when the Sikhs broke down the door. But Bugs was too quick—and too strong. He grabbed the bag and tore it from the hand of the Chinaman, speaking quickly to Ruttan Singh:

"Have your men guard and search the place—as I told you. We want no *futow jai* interruption. If any Chinese appear shoot to kill!"

Hip was murmuring politely, though his eyes were hard.

"A strange way to pay a visit, O searcher for the truth of philosophy. Yes, and worse. For the man who was my friend now robs me—takes my possessions from my hand rudely as would any common thief!"

And Bugs, as courteously, replied—

"I regret the rudeness, but my duty condones even that."

"Nothing can condone lack of courtesy," Hip began the ancient quotation from the Ethics, but Bugs broke in, like a man who hates the job he is compelled to do and wants it ended.

"Philosophy and courtesy and friendship have their places, but he who does not obey the law becomes a snake among his fellows, stinging without warning. Listen to my tale."

Hip bowed as calmly as if about to hear the other side of an argument, as if he expected nothing more than talk. Still speaking Chinese, Bugs went on:

"Because of my honorable ancestors—certainly not because of any merit of my own—I was lucky. I saw this Selung come out of your house and followed him. And thus I wove the tale from the threads gathered into my hand by kindly luck. Some months ago this Selung came into your store. The store was empty but for yourself and a poor white man who answered to the name Smithies. But Smithies lay upon the floor, snoring dirtily in drunken sleep. Out of the kindness of your heart you permitted him to lie there. You will remember the proverb concerning misplaced kindness—So, and the Selung came near to you and opened his hand, and—showed you a fine pearl. You were startled, for you did not know that there were pearls to be found in this part of the world. Neither did the government know, or any man save this Selung, and he did not know anything about pearls, but hoped what seemed pretty might be of value.

"He asked you to give him rice for the pearl, and you questioned him concerning its finding, thinking, likely, that he had stolen it. The Selung told you, and said that he had found a place on one of the islands where many pearls could be found. Then you realized that, save for the poor ignorant Selung and his equally poor and ignorant relatives, you were the only man in the world who knew that pearls could be found in the Mergui Archipelago.

"Being a good business man, you bartered with the Selung—said you would give him a sack of rice for every pearl of like size he brought to you, less rice for lesser pearls, more rice for greater pearls, if he would swear to tell no other man that there were pearls in the islands.

"To the Selung this seemed like a dream of heaven—all the rice he and his family could eat. He was rich. And neither were you to blame for making good business, even if you did trade a sack of rice for a pearl worth a thousand rupees. The Selung left with the rice, promising to come again with more pearls and promising to breathe no word, fearing if he did that he would get no rice. You even mentioned that the government might be mean and collect a tax—which was true.

"But your bartering and excitement had given wings to your voice; it had risen so that it had wakened Smithies. But Smithies—a thief of low parts—continued to snore, for he had not understood or heard all that had been said. All he knew was that a brown man had brought you a pearl. But even had he known it had come to you from the islands he would have not known which island. You were too wise to ask which island, knowing that if you went to that island yourself the secret would be out and you would no longer obtain thousand rupee pearls for sacks of rice, even if the government allowed the pearls to be taken—which you knew it might not.

"So Smithies knew a brown man had brought you a pearl and would bring more, and Smithies blackmailed you. You gave him what he asked for in drink and opium, and for a time Smithies was content. He was lazy and witless, and would not have known how to get pearls had he known where to get them. But Smithies grew nasty. You did not mind giving him drink and opium, but you did resent his manner of talking to you—for which no man can blame you. So you told one of the hatchet men to make an end of Smithies. These hatchet men were in your power; you knew too much about them, and they feared you whilst reverencing your superior birth. And they were content to be your men, knowing you would aid them if trouble came.

"So Smithies was killed. But before he died he wrote a letter, which was mailed. For it had come into the drunken mind of Smithies that certain convict friends of his in Australia might be able to handle the pearl matter so that he could get more out of the secret than you would give him. He knew, of course, that the chance was that his friends would, if they got the pearls, leave him in the lurch. But his mean soul had grown to hate you, because you had more than he had and he was dependent upon you for sustenance.

"Men came in the schooner and discovered that Smithies was dead. As Smithies had written your name and all about you in the letter, the men from the schooner decided that you had caused Smithies to die. So they came in here to you in the dead of night, determined to wrest the secret of the pearls from you. They tied you up and applied fire to your feet, hoping to make you tell them where they could go and get pearls. You managed to cry out, and your hatchet men heard you. They killed the two men of the schooner; then, at your bidding, went and killed every man on the schooner, destroying all papers on the bodies.

"The rest is known to you, save that I went on board this Selung's boat and went to the islands and arranged with this Selung to come here at an appointed hour tonight—an hour appointed with you; by him, also. The matter, friend in philosophy, was not difficult to understand, once I got on board the boat of the Selung. I regret deeply that the trail of my seeking led to you, for now you must come with me, and you must stand trial for your life, and I must warn you that anything you may say now may be used against you at that trial. Yes, I am sorry, so come now that the pain may not be rendered greater by your struggle."

Hip smiled.

"There will be no trouble, O clever man," he said gently. "I, too, regret—regret that a man I love should do this thing. You will say it was your duty. Maybe, but you will remember that the Sage said that friendship was greater than duty. Never mind. Your ancestors and mine thought nothing of killing to obtain what they wanted. And the times have only changed in this—that one man may not kill, according to your law, while your country thinks nothing of making a war and killing thousands—for the getting of a strip of land upon which there are not even pearls.

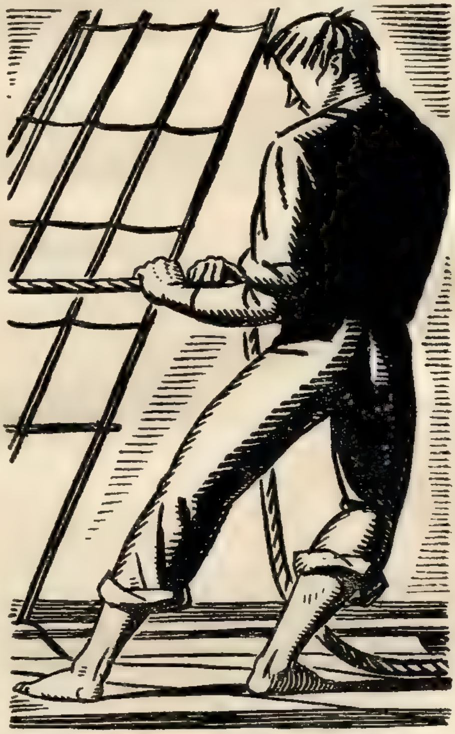
"It is of no matter that I die what is a dishonorable death by a rope. But it is of great moment that, during this brief flash of consciousness we call life, I lose a friend. Life is nothing in itself. Love and friendship make it sometimes worth while. And death—well, either death will teach me more than I know now, or death will teach me nothing. So, how can one lose by dying? Wait a moment and I will get my slippers and come with you."

The Swede Sailor hears of heroes

Fight

By ROBERT CARSE

FIGHT first and talk after—the creed of the sea. A fighter first, a sailor after—the creed of Sven Gjordsen. A simple code, but a simple man, Sven. It was there in his face, his physique, his manner, as he paced slowly up and down his little steel platform over the firehold of the freighter *Santa Bella,* out of Seattle.



A stocky man, Sven, shorter than most of his sea-going race. Five feet seven or eight, perhaps, in his heelless Chinaboy rattan slippers. In the language of the sea, he was a "squarehead," and to him it was well applied. The big, smooth skull under the tilted, white-topped watch-cap was not square, but bluntly round; the cheek bones broad; azure blue eyes set wide apart; nose short and finely chiseled; chin as square as the taffrail of a Maine-built lumber schooner; barrel chest bulging the tight singlet. The clean white scar which ran from brow to the top of the left ear lobe attested to his code, as did the powerful, vise-like hands which held a steel spanner.

Sven, as first assistant engineer of the old coal-burning tub *Santa Bella,* had use for that spanner at present. Even down there, next the keel of her, you could feel the shock and impact of the waves flinging at her, making rusty rivets and bulkhead beams squeak and complain. She was wallowing, heeling and wallowing again in the welter of the gale which skirled unleashed and rampant down from the ice floes of the Bering Straits just as she waddled in, jute-laden, from Manila, P. I., for the Straits of San Juan de Fuca and the safety of Puget Sound.

Below him on the floor-plates of the firehold the three half-caste firemen worked with jerky reluctance at their fires, looking up every now and then at the unsmiling officer, almond eyes on the spanner—mute testimonial of powerful and unwavering authority. Scum of the sea, those *mestizos,* thought Sven, stepping to the end of his platform for a peek at his gauges and his quasi-white oiler who winced in and around the chattering machinery, long-pronged oil can jetting here and there.

"Scum—scum of the sea," repeated Sven to himself, back at his post, glowering down at them. Men who flinched and looked longingly at the topside ladders as soon as she began to stick her nose under and tumble around a bit. Men with no more guts than a drove of Javanese shotes; men who would jump their watch-officer from the rear and bash his head in if their fear of death surmounted their fear of him. Scum, but the best you could do for a black-gang complement now, when the American ship-owners had slashed the working wages in half and driven most of the upstanding white men from the sea.

So he carried the eighteen-inch long spanner conspicuously—even now—when she hadn't begun to act up badly yet. Sven knew the psychology of that spanner, had learned it twenty years ago. Learned it when he was a neuresthenic, weak-eyed post-graduate, late from Stockholm University. His eyes had gone bad on him, and the medical men had prescribed "a couple of hearty years at sea" as a cure-all.

The years had been hearty—Sven had never once come back in twenty of them. Some day they might ship him home in a lead casket, but not before. Friends of the family had secured him a berth in a whaler bound for the Antarctic and the South Seas. There Sven had learned his code and his spanner psychology, only there it had been a belaying pin snatched from the rack, a pair of brass "knucks" or a boot-toe when a man was down and avowedly licked. Hard ways, but hard men; and the slim, neurotic Copenhagen student got his share—lost his glasses, his love for Ovid and, for a brief while, his self-respect.

Out of it he had emerged saturnine, cynical—two-fisted. No longer did he try to argue the ethics of the situation, but gave as he took, blows, curses and kicks alike.

In Valdivia in southern Chile, where the whaler put in for fresh water after two months in breasting Cape Stiff, Sven and five of his mates jumped ship. For a few *pesos* a dockside dive-keeper hid them until the big barkentine catted her mud-hooks on the heads, broke out her fore courses and fled the little port, leaving six grinning sailors on the beach.

From Valdivia in a coastwise Chilean brig bound for Buenos Ayres with guano. Off the Falklands a sudden, unseasonable gale hit them, ripped three suits of canvas off the little brig and claimed three of Sven's friends as tribute. In Buenos Ayres the remaining three Norsemen went on the beach again. Two of them shipped out almost immediately on a grain bark bound for Liverpool. Not Sven; he stayed, beach-bound by the langorous gaze of his *bella querida*, Dolores, a tiny *danza-danza* girl, fresh from Rosario. A romanticist, Sven, even under his new, hard-boiled exterior. Just romantic enough to listen to his *chiquita* and reap her love until they spent his last peso and she left him for the second mate of a Bremerhaven barkentine.

Sven, broad in the beam now, with hands like young hams, sought a ship. Chief mates laughed at his stories of lost papers and chased him down the ladder with a good-natured boot. At the end of a little alley in the Boca, which the *Argentinos* whimsically called "Dead Men's Corner," Sven found work as a barkeep. To get the billet he had first to take the man then incumbent out in the ooze of the alley and throw him shoulders down in a heaving catch-as-can wrestling bout.

Behind the Boca bar Sven ruled supreme in the toughest waterfront section of the world. Ruled supreme for three months, until the night when he got the clean scar from brow to ear lobe. A six-foot-four Bahaman negro with one eye gave it to him after Sven had refused further libations by all Bahamans at that particular drink emporium. Sven was young and bold. He leaned down below the bar for a fresh bottle of *Schnapps*. While he was getting it the Bahaman gentleman snapped the neck off a *cerveza* bottle by cracking it neatly against the bar. When Sven emerged with his *Schnapps* the Bahaman jabbed the jaggedly broken end against Sven's jaw. An old trick.

Blood in his eyes and mouth, stunned to fighting madness, Sven was over the bar and grappling with the waiting negro. While the bar girls whimpered and prayed aloud, the two men had it out, white skin and brown, over tables and chairs. Sven killed him—broke his back over a table.

THAT dawn Sven sailed out of B. A. —for the first and last time—in an American six-mast fore-and-after. In the pocket of his jumper were forged A. B.'s ticket and seaman's passport faked by his late employer. In the fore-and-after Sven worked into the job of donkeyman, tending to the little boiler and steam-engine 'midships which raised the power for the handling of the sails.

Long years then, while Sven shipped in all the packets of the legendary Seven Seas, steering clear of two ports, Buenos Ayres and Copenhagen. Long years, while the last of the windjammers were driven from the trade routes and the lucrative cargoes by the lumbering coal-burners.

With the advent of steam and the disappearance of the skys'lers the sea lost its glamor for Sven. It was the one trade he knew, the one life he loved, so he stayed, and turned engineer. On a good recommendation from the skipper and first mate of a French deep-sea steam trawler he shipped in a Boston tramp as deck engineer, in charge of winches, capstans and steering-engine.

Ten years as a forecastle stiff had made him a fine sailor. Two years in steam showed him that the men in the deck company of a coal-burning tramp were not sailors, or seldom had need to be. In New York Sven went up before the Steamboat Service Inspection examination and got his third assistant engineer's ticket. Eight years more of it, while coal-burners were antedated by oil fuel, Diesels and radio compasses came in, and Sven was first assistant of the *Santa Bella.*

Through it all his simple creed had served him well—fight first and talk after. It had been the life blood of the hard-case, slave-driving mates of the clipper ships and it stood secure here in the fire-hold of the tumbling, plainting *Santa Bella.*

Swaying lithely to the lurch of the ship, Sven walked to the end of his platform to read his dials. In the last half hour the head of steam had dropped off twenty-five pounds, bit by bit, imperceptibly. Sven turned and marched down the platform, jaw out, blue eyes flickering through half-shut lids.

The chief was topside in his bunk, dosing himself with heroic potions of the steward's quinine, wracked and spent with the agues of the Island fever. Sven, as first assistant and next in command, was responsible for the ship below decks. Where he stood he could feel the ancient scow shunt and jump as the combers curled over her windward bulwarks. The wind had shifted—he could tell that from the gusts of air and spray coming from the big ventilators. And these swine had let their fires fall off until the pressure had dropped twenty-five pounds.

Scum! He leaned over the railing, spanner held out like a director's baton, eyeing the half-naked firemen who stood resting on their shovels, dabbing at their faces with sooty sweat-cloths His growl was low, curt and ominous.

"You —— svine! Freshen up them fires or I giff you this. *Savez? Pronto ehora!* You —— trimmers, come outa dere. W'at you do, t'row coal so far back? Dump dem barrows close up or I will come down dere. Quick, now!"

Fire doors clanged back and the *mestizos* leaned forward, tense and nervous as the ship canted and rolled beneath their feet, jabbing with their slice-bars at the fires, bronze torsos bathed in the belching red breath of the coals. Dropping slice-bars, they grasped their shovels and, swinging in unison, hunched shovelful after shovelful of the shale-filled Nagasaki coal into the waiting maws. Slice-bars again, smoothing out the fresh fuel, then the doors clanged shut and they leaned on their shovels once more, sullen cat-like eyes on the oily water beginning to ooze through the floor plates from the choked bilges.

Sven leaned low over his railing, fingering the lean steel of the big spanner, a threatening Vulcan. Like wraiths from across the shadowy Styx, the two coal-trimmers emerged from the bunkers, dropping down their steel coal barrows. One of them, whose squint eyes blinked out of a sweaty face, shiny as polished onyx, glared balefully at the officer above him. Dabbing at his mouth with his foully black sweat rag, he chattered in pidgin English:

"We no stay in there no longair. Coal sheeft all aroun' like one ——, *Corpus Crist,'* we get keel! *No possibla, señor.*"

"*Si, si, de veras,*" growled his mate in affirmation, fingering the grimy waistband of his dungarees where Sven knew a long knife rested.

Not men, these chunks of offal, but swine. Swine who could not understand that if they did not trundle coal for the firemen's shovels the *Bella* would founder on a lee shore and they would all drown like rats in the lifeboats. Men who would rather drown rat-like that way than labor longer in the noxious confines of the bunkers, where a gaseous effluvium rose from the wetted coal. Half-breed Filipinos, these, with Chinese, Malay and Igorot blood muddled in their veins—creatures with moronic, child-like brains. Men to whom logic meant nothing, in whom fear reigned paramount and alone. Sven straightened up and smote the spanner against the shining steel rail until the engine-room reverberated to the keening thrum of the blows.

"You, dar, svine. Lay back in dem bunkers or I giff you dis! *Mestizo* swabs lay in dar, I—"

He had done more than his share of talking. He started for the short ladder which led down to the deck of the fire-hold, but the two recalcitrants had fled back to their bunkers. Sven smiled shortly and swung on the scowling firemen. As if a whip-lash had flicked over their naked backs, they flung into the piles of stinking coal, muscles rippling and jerking as they hunched up their shovels with a short-armed sweep and sent the coal spraying across the ever-hungry fires.

A sharp shriek came from the mouth of the bridge speaking-tube. Sven put his ear to the orifice but could make out nothing but a vague mumbling shout above the thrashing clamor of the seas. He looked at the dial of the steam-gauge and then at the indicator where the little red arrow pointed to "FULL SPEED AHEAD." That was what they wanted—more steam! Well, he was gaining back the lost twenty-five pounds and the rattle-trap barge would soon give all she had again.

The *Santa Bella* was tossing and heaving roisterously now, rolling to her very beam ends. Then she came back, slowly, sluggishly, while water sluiced down through the tattered canvas ventilator covers and douched the sweating firemen with biting cold spray.

Sven went aft to the throttle and settled there, legs spread, hands on the regulator, to shut off the power when the stern lifted out of the seas and the big propellor *zung-zung-zunged* futilely in the air. Inside the confines of the long shaft alleyway he could hear the wash and gurgle of water. Water that had seeped up through the choked bilges and was rippling around the feet of the firemen. They didn't look up or halt any more, Sven noticed grimly. They were working with sullen, morose fear—fear of him, Sven Gjordsen; fear of the spanner. That would last just so long. The fear of drowning down there while the deck force escaped in the boats would overcome their fear of him. Then they would drop their slice-bars and shovels and come for him, there, at the ladder-head. Time enough then. Fight first and talk after.

He looked up when the topside door swung open and an oilskin-clad figure clumped in, spume and cold air gushing after. Once again the firemen halted their labors to peer longingly at the man coming down the ladder. This man was a sailor, a deck officer. He worked topside, where, when the order to abandon ship came, he would have first chance at the lifeboats. They knew that, irrevocably and finally, despite all that had been drubbed into them at fire drill; despite all that Sven had taught them about lowering away, fending and casting off.

Perhaps this lucky deck officer was coming now, to tell that golden-haired —— with the spanner that they could leave this stinking, rocking hell and clamber aloft to where the boats lay griped in their gallows, big cork-belts under the thwarts. A bark of command from Sven and they went back to the interminable monotony of shovel, slice, poke and shovel again.

The young third mate, sou'wester low on his nose, face and weather clothing white with brine and frozen spray, rolled down the platform towards the first assistant, wet sea-boots steaming on the hot metal of the place. As he spoke, particles of frozen brine flaked from his face and mouth.

"Skipper wants t' know if yuh can get any more steam outa her, First. Wind's swung nor'-nor'west an' it's drivin' us right in t'ards Cape Flattery. Got three men on the wheel an' we've brought her nose up time 'n ag'in but she won't hold up. Ol' Man's had t' turn an' run fer it. On'y five miles off the beach now, 'cordin' t' what reckonin's an' soundin's we can make. Turning out all the R. P. M. she can, eh? —— ole scow! Should've junked her twenty years ago."

Sven dipped his head in mute assent. He hooked a grimed thumb in the direction of the toilers.

"I god dem *cholos* doin' all dey can. Dar ain't no more t' do. Vat de Ol' Man tink, ennyhow? Tell him dot we von't let—"

A sudden horrible, tortured shriek issued from the coal bunkers. Sven released his grip on the throttle and jumped forward to the ladder-head, spanner ready. The third mate clumped at his heels, cursing youthfully. Manuelo, one of the coal trimmers, vomited in a cloud of soot from the mouth of the bunkers, blood scrabbled among the sooty curls of his hair, eyes fiery drops of bottomless terror. He stumbled and fell heavily across the firehold. One arm stuck out ludicrously, broken at the elbow and wrist, sharp bones peeping through the olive skin. He pitched to his knees, and one of the firemen yanked him erect. Gasping and spitting bloody saliva amid supplications to "*madre mia,*" he plunged for the ladder head where Sven stood waiting.

"Vast, dar, bush pig! Lay to, queeck!"

Before the menace of the scythe-like swing of the spanner the pain-crazed half-breed wavered and stopped. He poked the writhing, fingers of his good hand to his mouth, where saliva had coursed a line of yellowish red through the soot. Horror-glazed eyes fastened on Sven.

"Pedro—Pedro—*eh, eh, madre mia!* Pedro keel—Pedro keel—*muerte,* see? Coal sheeft—groooosh!—like that—ovair heem! Barrow fall on me. O-heh! *Sangre di Crist'!*"

The muscles of Sven's jaw flexed, moved, grew rigid. The three firemen and the all-but-white oiler had ceased their work and were staring at the maimed man. An hour ago they had heard the plaint of the two trimmers that the coal was shifting in the perilous, narrow spaces of the bunkers. And now Pedro was killed, buried beneath tons of coal, life crushed from him as you would kill a mosquito on your wrist. Manuelo, too, stood there, half-dead, maimed for life—and that golden-haired pig would not let them go on deck.

They were admitted cravens; they feared the golden-haired *gringo* with the spanner, but they had suffered enough in these water-filled, gaseous caves of the Evil One. They started hesitantly forward, red-hot slicebars stuck before them, as a soldier carries a bayoneted rifle. Manuelo stood sobbing horridly, pawing at his smashed arm and the deep head gash where the overturning barrow had struck him.

Without shifting his gaze from the men in front of him Sven spoke over his shoulder to the breathless deck officer.

"Grab dis svine, Mate. Take 'im into de storekeeper's cuddy, dar. Fin' line—lash him—set de arm. Stan' dar an' wait. No —— revolvers—no! I don' want t' kill dese svine—joost chase 'em back to de fires once more. Go!"

His great, hairy hand licked out, grasped the comatose Manuelo, shoved him up the ladder into the arms of the mate; then he bunched his fist. The first of the mutineers was at him, glowing slice-bar slashing at his head. Sven ducked and sidestepped on the narrow ladder platform. The spanner flicked out, to tap lightly at a conical skull. The slice-bar fell clattering as the *mestizo's* knees caved in and he toppled over into the coal. Sven laughed deep in his throat, lips bared from even white teeth.

"Svine! Svine o' Rio Pasig mud flats. Dirty *taos!* Come! Come!"

A slice-bar darted in, quick as a licking tongue of flame. Steel clinked against steel as the spanner caught the blow. A hairy fist hurtled through the air. Teeth clicked like ice in a pitcher; almond eyes rolled until the whites leered comically. Now the last two were at him, the oiler with an upraised shovel. Sven dodged from side to side of his small foothold. Spanner fended shovel, and he swayed out to smash home the great fist. With a breathy grunt the other man whaled downward with the still red slice-bar. Sven heard the hum of it before he saw it, and pulled away his head. The hot steel smashed down and Sven reeled back, collar-bone crunched in like a broken pipe-stem.

He sprawled backward on the steps, dazed by the blow. Snarling like a blood-mad panther at the kill, the fireman was in, bar high above his head. Sven laughed between his teeth, jabbed up and out with the spanner. Just under the point of the tawny jaw the spanner bit through the skin. The man keeled away, blood spurting in a hot jet from the punctured flesh. Up on his knees, staggering to his feet, and the oiler, the last of these dogs of ——, was hammering up the steps, shovel hurled away in favor of the trusted six-inch knife.

Sven crouched on the top step, spanner fanning the air in an ever-increasing swing. The knife flickered in and down. The spanner rose, quicker than light. Bone snapped; knuckles cracked against swart skin; and the oiler spraddled the steps for a moment, to trundle over backward unconscious, his wrist broken. Panting between tight lips, Sven heaved around and looked aloft where the third mate stood by the door of the engine-room storekeeper's cuddy, still belligerently waggling a mammoth four-foot Stillson wrench. He threw away his weapon with a clatter and skidded down the ladder to Sven.

The first assistant stood erect, relaxed the taut muscles of his jaw and grinned.

"My God!" babbled the youngster. "I thought sure as —— they were goin' to bash you in, First! What now, fer ——'s sake?"

"Lay topside! Break out secon' an' third assistants. Come back wid dem. Ve need you here more dan on bridge. Vait, go tell Ole Man ve have steam for him!"

The lad hesitated, only to be sent running by Sven's growl. When he piled below five minutes later with the two assistant engineers Sven was booting the quartette of vanquished ones into sensibility again. Sven released his hold on the spanner and nodded his head at Joe Burns, the second assistant.

"Log dese svine two weeks' pay, Joe. You take her now, hey?"

Then he was struggling alone up the ladder, blood from his smashed shoulder smirching one whole side of his jumper. They stared up at him, and the hand of the steam gauge rose once more.

WITH dawn the gray cloud-packs split asunder and heavy rain slashed with a subduing spatter at the cresting seas. The Old Man stood in the lurching wheel-room abaft the bridge watching with open joy the rising hand of the barometer indicator. He gulped down the steaming hot cup of black Jamocha offered him by the lividly seasick officers' messman. He turned to the forward side of the house, where his first mate stood peering out with tired eyes through the salt-incrusted windows. The Old Man's voice was waspishly hoarse from the strain of the night.

"Take her, now, Mike. Head her up an' make fer Flattery. Ye'll pick up the Straits pilot around five bells on the after watch. I'm goin' below an' set Gjordsen's broken shoulder now. Them stinkin' *mestizos* almost sent us all on a call t' Davy's last night. Break me out when we take the pilot aboard."

The mate nodded in tired silence, beckoning to the man at the wheel to put his helm down a couple of spokes to port. The Old Man clumped through the doorway and down the ladder, looking like a sea Druid with his haggard hawk face, icy beard and frosted weather clothes.

TWO labor-soddened A. B.'s who had been on watch for twenty hours pulled the stocky British Columbian pilot over the smashed tangle of the rail as the *Santa Bella* cavorted and plunged off San Juan de Fuca late that afternoon. In the close bunk Sven Gjordsen fumbled feverishly at the bandages on his shoulder, while below in a strangely quiet fireroom the bleak Scots engineer alternately dosed himself with quinine and hurled forensic Glasgow curses at his firemen.

The Old Man himself sat at the tiller of the lifeboat they lowered away when the *Santa Bella* hove to off Port Townsend. They placed Sven, lashed down with knotted sheets to his mattress, across the boat thwarts, and the mate handled the line as they slacked slowly away. All of the crew who could walk lined the shore rail when the Old Man gave the orders, "In the water!" and "Pull away!"

The unwieldy craft swung her bow toward the brick buildings of the town and the rambling white shape of the Marine Hospital crowning the bluff. The Old Man brought her smoothly alongside and the boathooks bit into the dock side. Waiting, gentle hands raised Sven from the boat into the ready ambulance. The Old Man looked at his boat crew and then at the ambulance, hesitating a moment. He grinned down at the completely fagged men sprawling over their shipped oars.

"I know you boys need shut-eye an' a couple o' shots o' my best *sake*, but I'm goin' up th' hill with this sick-bay craft an' see that they give this here wild, scrappin' squarehead o' ours an A-1 deal. Won't be long, lads."

He waved a hand to his boat crew and swung up on the rear of the ambulance with the white-jacketed interne. The ambulance snorted and rolled over the planks of the dock through the fringe of gaping loafers.

"There goes two o' th' finest guys that ever come over th' side o' any hooker," mumbled one of the boat crew, and promptly joined his mates in sleep, head resting on the top of his row-lock.

The doctor replaced the crude dressing, pulled the sheets back into place and faced the hollow-eyed skipper of the *Santa Bella*.

"He—?" said the Old Man, and stopped.

The doctor finished it for him.

"He got one —— of a badly smashed shoulder, Captain. And I'm afraid to say infection has probably set in—looks like it. It seems that extraneous matter—coal dust or oil—has worked into the open wound and that your antiseptic applications were not sufficient to offset the infection."

"Which all means in sailorman English —Doc?"

"That your first assistant engineer is one pretty badly wounded man, Captain. Oh, ——, don't worry, we'll have him out of here fit as a new fiddle in a couple of months."

The scowl lifted from the Old Man's lined, wan face and he ceased jerking loose the roots of his beard.

"That there last is a —— sight better readin' than yer first, Doc. Let me know over t' the agent's office in Seattle how he's comin' along. 'Cause there's goin' t' be a chief's berth waitin' for him when he comes out, or I'm a Malay swab—which I ain't. He's some wild square-head, Doc. Well, so long an' thanks, Doctor."

The Old Man stood looking down briefly at the flushed face of his "wild squarehead," then wheeled and thumped down the long ward in his heavy seaboots.

An hour later the orderlies lifted Sven on to the rubber-wheeled operation wagon and pushed him through the wide doors of the ether-redolent room where nurses and doctors stood, silently preparing ether cones and gleaming instruments.

THAT night in Seattle the agents for the *Santa Bella* called in the reporters of the morning papers. By morning the story of Sven's deed, more or less fancifully embellished and garbled, due to the efforts of the young third mate and the newspapermen, was on the front pages of the Seattle dailies. Sven Gjordsen, "intrepid first assistant engineer of the freighter, S. S. *Santa Bella*," was another of the "legion heroes of the sea."

The first thing Sven knew about any of it at all was when he emerged from the nauseous ether fog and asked in a queerly hoarse voice for a glass of water. The tall, somber nurse in starched blue-and-white standing by his bedside nodded and handed him the glass.

"It will make you awfully sick, Gjordsen."

That was the first time he had been so addressed since his lecture hall days at the university. He drank the water and was sick. The spell passed and he fell asleep, breathing fitfully, like a feverish child. When he awoke the long, high-ceilinged room was all in darkness. He lifted his head a little. Pain in a stabbing, barbed wave burned through him. He was gripped in the jaws of a giant vise of agony that clamped him from head to foot, making his brain reel like a bark being taken aback. He sank down again, teeth clenched, finding that his one good hand was lashed flat to the side of the bed with a wide elastic band. At the other end of the ward where a shaded lamp glowed softly, he could hear the crackle of stiffly starched skirts. Soft footsteps pattered toward his bed and he looked up when the nurse bent over him.

"You must lie perfectly still, Gjordsen."

"Vy?" growled Sven perversely, even while the pain still lingered and quivered poignantly.

"You will displace your dressings and disturb the drains."

"Vat drains?" murmured Sven, feeling particularly childish and weak.

Miss O'Neill, with seventeen years of hospital work to her credit, was accustomed to the vagaries of strong men made peevishly juvenile in their nervous reactions to acute pain. She slipped into the chair beside the bed and told him. When she was done Sven closed his eyes and appeared to sleep. But when he peeped up she was still there, motionless and calm in the darkness.

"Can I smoke?"

"Yes, your pipe is right here. I've filled it for you."

She placed it between his teeth and lighted it. At the flare of the match, the man beside Sven rolled nervously and chattered broken phrases in his sleep. Across the aisle another sleepless one whimpered and thrashed at the lashings which held his hands from his shattered leg. Miss O'Neill rose and crossed the ward, a vague shadow among shadows, to where the whimpering one seethed and mumbled. Again quiet in the big room. Miss O'Neill resumed her place beside Sven and took the pipe from his lips just as the last bit of tobacco expired.

"Want more?"

"No, thanks."

"Try and sleep now if you can."

A shame she couldn't give him a sleeping potion, she reflected, rustling down the ward toward her chair and book. But after an operation like that his heart was too weak to accept the action of drugs. He didn't whimper, anyway—there was that in his favor. Miss O'Neill picked up the thread of her detective thriller again while Sven lay rigid, staring eyes on the ceiling. Down the ward the man with the broken leg moaned and expostulated whiningly in his sleep. Another broke into a low quaver of pent-up agony. Miss O'Neill's skirts made a soft susurrus as she moved up the ward, and the noises ceased. Not him, thought Sven, savagely, not as long as he could grit his teeth together.

THROUGH the big windows at the head of his bed came the first faint rose glow of the sun, almost impalpable, but steadily driving the shadows before it. The light changed to eerie silver, to deep rose again, to mauve, to the color of melting gold, then unwavering white. The sun was marching up over the sea out there, he mused, a globe of liquescent glory, bloodying the sea, firing the ripples, spangling the comber tops with flakes of fire, drawing up the night mists. Watches were being changed out there now at the *tink-tink—tink-tink* of the bells. Tired men yawned at grinning fresh ones and the work of the sea went on, regardless of him, regardless of that night in the firehold of the *Santa Bella.* And he lay here flat on his back, weak as a green apprentice after his first drinking bout in a foreign port.

The pain hordes rose up and marched through his brain. The thought died. He shifted his head on the pillows and floated away into a dreamless stupor of exhaustion.

SIX weeks he had rested there, stretched flat on his back. Six weeks of unrelenting pain. Pain that never ceased jabbing and hammering through your brain, never halted pounding and thundering in your ears, gnawing at your stomach, making even your knees and toes ache. Twice they had lifted him from the bed to the rubber-wheeled wagon and rolled him through the wide swinging doors of the operating room. In there the white-clad ones with the rubber gloves had given him momentary surcease when they flooded his brain with ether. But when he struggled back through the miasmatic fogs of it and to consciousness once more, the pain was there, throbbing and stinging with fingers of fire, as ever.

He was tired, awfully tired—that was the trouble. If they would only let him alone for a little. Give him a chance to get his wind, as a man does in a fight, so he could rise up and smite those pain devils, drive them from his shoulder, breast and brain. Then he could go back there again, where the winds skirled and whispered in your ears, as if glad to see you back, and the smell of the salt crept into your being again and the sea-gulls jabbered and dipped from wave crest to wave crest. But it was always like this, except when he slept, and even then it didn't leave him—only dulled a little for a while. He opened his eyes and looked up. Miss Daly, the day nurse, stood over him.

"Morning, Sven!"

He tried to make reply, but the effort ended in a low whisper.

"Inspection now, Sven. An' the major's goin' to stop an' talk with you. He'll have you out o' here an' back with your ole turbines pretty darn soon. Hold the old head up now."

Sven bobbed his head weakly on the pillow and moved his lips wordlessly. On either side of him the men were sitting up in bed, night gowns straightened out, pillows freshly primped and arranged by the orderlies. Sven could hear the inspection party moving down the ward; the sharp, curt questions of the Medical Corps major, doctor commandant of the big hospital; and the low, mumbled replies of the seamen. Now the man beside him was being interrogated and whining back some bilge about not being able to sleep. Sleep! Sven stirred angrily and the pain demons jumped and danced. Sleep! Why the swine slept a full six hours a night, while he, Sven, hadn't had more than a scant twenty-four in all the six weeks or so he'd been here, lashed to his bunk like the spare dory shipped on the roof of a schooner's cookhouse.

The inspection party had stopped at the foot of his bed now and he could hear Miss Daly's faintly Irish brogue as she read the little red card belayed to the foot of the bed, which gave his name, rating, cause of accident and nature of the case. Miss Daly halted, and the harsh, nasal tones of the commandant broke in.

"Smashed collar bone and gangrenous shoulder, eh? How's the bone? Had to cut out two inches, eh? Blood pressure low, heart action retarded, general behavior listless. Seems a fine hulk of a man—ought to throw off some of that poison himself. Using the Dakin on this man, Lieutenant? Good. What's wrong with this next man?"

The inspection party moved on and the voices gradually droned away. When the pain devils released their thrall for a little, Sven mulled dully over the words of the commandant. They had taken two inches of bone out of his shoulder, two inches— He knew what that meant—there was only one answer to that, one answer. Never again would he stand knee to knee with a man, that queer, tight feeling in his throat, fists pounding, flailing, smashing. Never again would he drive back a herd of two-legged swine to their fires with a hail of spanner blows. Never again—

He dozed.

When he awoke, Miss Daly was in the little chair by his bed, stirring the contents of a tall glass, his afternoon egg-nog. Sven rolled his head on the pillow and the nurse leaned over as his lips moved. With a supreme effort of the will Sven hurled the pain demons from his brain and whispered:

"Doctor says—they cut two inches of bone—from my shoulder. Vat does dat mean, Miss Daly? Tell—me?"

His sea-blue eyes burned at her out of the ghoul-white frame of his face. Miss Daly dropped her eyes before that gaze and made a gallant pretext of stirring the already thoroughly whipped egg-nog. Even with her head turned she could feel the blaze of those eyes. Sven's lips moved again.

"Vat he mean, Nurse?"

Miss Daly rested the spoon in the froth of the egg-nog. Her fingers clenched, loosened, and clenched again under her apron.

"Why it means, Sven—that you'll be all right. Just—just that you won't be able to—to—do what you used to do any more. That side of your body won't— You won't be able to use it, that's all. Now, I'd get scalped if the major knew I told you, Sven. But I—I think you've a right to know—you've suffered so much. Now be a good lad an' drink your egg-nog as if it was a glass o' real Guiness stout, won't you, lad?"

Sven bobbed his head on the pillows and dutifully downed the egg-nog. Miss Daly patted the pillows smooth and smiled bravely down at him.

"Now, Sven, *avourneen*, it's up to you t' get well. You're goin' to' get well, that's it. You're goin' to fight those pain devils burnin' in there t' a stand-still—whip 'em thumbs down. Aren't you, laddie?"

Again he moved his head in assent, but his eyelids were closed, to hide the agony leaping there like a caged thing.

Miss Daly straightened her cap and starchy cuffs, picked up the empty glass and stood erect. Sven lay motionless under the neatly folded sheets, immobile and quiet as a dead man—as a dead man—

"Bad cess t' all such thoughts," breathed Miss Daly silently and started down the ward, trying to smile.

She stopped and looked back. Sven's bony cheeks did have a colorless, death-like tinge. For a moment Miss Daly stood there, absently fingering the empty glass, then returned to the bedside chair again.

"Sven, laddie, is there anythin' I can do for you? Anythin' you would have done?"

The wax-like eyelids quivered, opened gradually, and he was looking up at her, lips working. She leaned down so that the cool fragrance of her hair was near his cheek.

"I vould like to hear you read me from de 'Odyssey,' Nurse. Joost a leetle—I—"

The whisper was lost in a choking gasp as the pain tore at him. Miss Daly sat staring straight before her. The 'Odyssey,' when he was dying! A great, two-fisted fighter like him wanting to be read a book like a sick child, and such a book!

"All right, laddie. Lie quiet an' I shall."

The moon-faced orderly, summoned by her look, stood waiting at the end of the bed.

"Quick, now, George! Get the 'Odyssey' from Miss Bruning in the libr'ry an' bring it here to me. He'll be right down, Sven."

Through the first faint purple flush of the dusk she sat there beside him, stumbling through the stately lines of the Homer. When the light failed her she placed the big volume on the table at her elbow. She turned to look down at him. Sven's good hand lay on the coverlet, long, blunt fingers twitching, his eyes watching their movements.

"That's all I can read to-day, laddie. I didn't know those old Greeks were sailors like that."

A suggestion of a smile played about his mouth for a moment. The fingers stopped their jerking play.

"Yes—dey were—sailors, too— Thank you, Nurse."

"Now, Sven, anythin' more?"

The big head rolled to and fro negatively.

"Sleep now, Sven lad, an' I'll see you in the morning."

But the wax-like eyelids had closed again and he lay without moving. Miss Daly rose, patted the big hand, and moved down the ward. Miss O'Neill stood at the desk in the alcove, waiting to relieve her. Miss Daly plucked at her cuffs a little nervously.

"I—I've been reading a book by a man named Homer about some old Greeks to Gjordsen, Mary. He—asked me to. You see, this morning, at inspection, he overheard the major talking about his shoulder. An'—he asked me—if—"

"You told him, Anna?"

"Yes, I thought—that he should know."

"The only thing to do, I guess, Anna. If he wants to live that way, all right. I'm glad you read him the Homer, because if he doesn't, why—"

But Miss Daly had picked up her heavy cape and was gone.

Sven opened his eyes when Miss O'Neill dropped into the chair by his bed.

"Want your pipe now, Sven?"

He shook his head slightly. For a while she sat there, finally placing her fingers on his pulse. But the pulse in the broad wrist thumped steadily to the action of his heart, although slowly, as if tired and enfeebled by the incessant battle. At last she arose and moved down the ward and Sven opened his eyes. Across the way, the fellow who had fallen from a boatswain's chair, to crack his backbone into splinters, was dying. He could tell it from the sounds. They had a low shaded lamp over there, and had pulled a screen around the bed. All evening long the fellow had been wailing fitfully, only to go into a long insensate haze before the end. Doctors and orderlies hastened noiselessly back and forth; forms blotted out the faint light from the lamp. He was dead now. They had removed the screen and were wheeling the body slowly down the ward, a sheet drawn over the convulsed features. The low light and the voices were gone; so was that poor wretch.

Sven rolled his head to and fro on the pillows while the pain armies stamped and rioted through his brain. Six weeks and more he'd been fighting, just like that poor *mozo* they had just carted out then. Six weeks, only to learn that he could never stand straight and strong and fight again. Unnumbered days of ceaseless combat with this thing that gnashed and clawed at him, to leave him limp, half mad and gasping.

How much more of it, he didn't know—didn't care. What was the use, this fighting? Fighting this thing which crouched upon him, like a giant vulture on an already still corpse. Life? He could have that, yes. And what for? To sit for the rest of his life in some Sailors' Snug Harbor, wearing out bed-room slippers and rigging toy models of the *Sovereign of the Seas!* Better to let it all slide, let this thing conquer—clean him bow to poop rail, and go on out into the other place—where at least there wasn't pain like this.

Go out swiftly, smoothly, without fighting. Without fighting with his brain, as he had fought with his hands for twenty years. The twenty years had numbed his brain, stolen away the power that was once there. The power that he did not have now to fight this thing that lowered over him, like a leopard over a fresh-killed prey, only waiting for the right moment to claw and tear swiftly at him. That was why he had asked her to stumble through the Homer—through the tale of the tired and disillusioned Ulysses leading back his rabble of Argonauts to a war-weakened, defeated Greece.

And he, here, flat on his back, gutted and spent with the ravages of the pain beasts. He, too, had lost, as had Ulysses; had made his last voyage and was going out into that other place—body a useless hulk; fingers that once had been ink-stained from translating the stiff Homeric lines, blunted, warped, broken by the twenty years of fighting and working which lay behind, now, like the fading wake of a ship. Fingers which were now reluctant servants of that tired, spent brain which had slowly given away before the encroachment of that brawling, blustering life. They would welcome him when he came home—if they were alive—but they would look at those broken, worthless fingers, the wracked, grotesque body, and turn their heads away.

Outside it was raining. The cold, drumming, insistent rain of the Pacific Northwest. Dinning and threshing on the windows behind him, like the distant stamp of a thousand hoofs across some snow-swept prairie, like the rattle of rifle fire afar off. There was a dreary, hopeless threnody to it, like the choked sobbing of a tortured woman, like the tune of that old Norse saga. The one the ancient *skalds* used to sing about the eager, reaching waves, sweeping out at an icy shore, groping for the soul of some long-dead Viking buried in a rocky pyre on the seaside.

This thought faded and was lost. He seemed to be standing in the eyes of a sailing ship that hurtled under topgallants and royals. Ahead, scrolled on the aquamarine shield of the sea, rose the green, slim fronds of coco-palm trees. Exotic flowers burgeoned from the lush undergrowth below where the sands, sparkling as scattered grains of gold dust, reached out to coral atolls embracing the limpid azure of the sea. The Golden Island of Saint Mary's! That was it. He had heard old sailors tell of it and had scoffed at their mid-watch yarns. "Sailors' last port o' call, Fiddler's Green and Davy's Locker, all rolled into one," they had called it. Here were no pain devils, no moaning wind and beating, unending rain. Here, surcease forever!

Sven laughed aloud. Miss O'Neill cut away his nightgown sleeve. The dark figure standing beside her leaned forward. Something keenly sharp plunged into the muscles of Sven's good shoulder. Slowly the vision of beckoning fronds and golden sands died, engulfed in the old familiar fog again.

Miss O'Neill pulled back the soft blanket over the sleeping man and shivered a little in spite of herself. The doctor returned the syringe to its case and cursed softly in the darkness.

"We just caught that gent in time. In about three more seconds his heart action would have stopped for good. Yes, and one more 'hyp' like that and he'll be going to his Valhalla willy-nilly. Should've warned me before, Miss O'Neill."

The tall nurse shook her head in the shadows.

"I—I didn't expect it of him. He was making such a brave fight all along. Miss Daly was even reading Homer to him this afternoon."

"Sven Gjordsen, eh? That's the Viking fellow they've been talking so much about over in Seattle. Saved his ship when she was on a lee shore. Beat back his mutinying firemen when they wanted to break for the boats. Yes, you're right. Strange for a chap like him to let himself go and pass out of the picture like that. Didn't make much of a fight, did he? No! Only six weeks and more of it! Poor, brave beggar!

"You say Miss Daly was reading Homer to him this afternoon. Hmmm! Must've had it all figured out in his head that he was going to let himself go out tonight. Return of Ulysses from Troy, he was probably thinking about, when he asked her to read it. Strange, that Homer business. I—uh, Miss O'Neill, I'll see that patient about nine in the morning."

"Yes, Lieutenant. Good night!"

He smiled back. A good nurse, Miss O'Neill. Then he stamped off down the hall, fingers stuck in the lower button of his tunic.

Once in his little room in the officers' quarters he locked the door, unearthed his best pipe and his last bottle of Scotch and plunked into his Morris chair under the small reading lamp. From the bookcase he reached down a dusty whisky glass, a collection of John Masefield's sea poems, including "Dauber," and a tome on applied psychology. Throughout the shank of the night he sat there, puttees unlatched, tunic open, turning first to the brown bottle, then the poems, then the weightier volume.

A strange case, this blond-haired assistant engineer. A man who battled back his firemen with silent grimness, then came to the sick-bay to die, voluntarily, after listening to Homer. A man who would—

The lieutenant smiled a little at the smoke feathers from his pipe as he sat there. He had it now—his method of attack: first, that which would appeal to the brawling sailor; the other, to the man who craved Homer before he died.

Just as the sun poked a fuliginous rim over the low slopes by Bremerton, he halted his musing. Stripping off his clothing before the open window, he laughed low to himself, muttering—

"I'll fix that heroic Viking or eat my Sam Browne, so strike me down, Mahomet!"

With which he tumbled into bed. At eight o'clock he was out, dressed and down hammering respectfully but insistently on the door of the commandant's quarters. He aroused that dyspeptic and pompous gentleman from his slumbers and advanced a proposition. The commandant grumbled a little—he was used to his younger housemen's making such volunteer propositions—and assented. Young Green, here, was a corking good bone surgeon and a bit of a psychologist. What if he did want to take a long shot on patching up this apathetic Swede. The commandant grudged a "yes" from under his mustache, Lieutenant Green snapped an unneeded salute and was gone, rejoicing.

When Sven came out from under the opiate around nine o'clock Lieutenant Green was sitting by his bed. Sven looked at him out of dull eyes, then dropped his lids again. Lieutenant Green didn't wait to mince words.

"Hey, Gjordsen!"

Sven reopened foggy eyes. The lieutenant rushed on—

"They've told you around here that you can't use that shoulder of yours again, haven't they?"

Sven's head lifted a full two inches from the pillows as he stared at the doctor.

"Well, they're wrong. They're all crazy aloft, get me? Because I can cure you—an' what's more, I'm going to!"

The blue eyes were as bright as a sun-kissed sea now and fixed full upon him.

"I'm going to do a bone graft on you. Easy as can be—saw dozens of 'em done in France. Did a couple myself, back at the base in Neuilly. You'll be able to kill a bull with one soak of your right hand when I'm through with you. Get me?"

The big blond head rolled back and forth.

"Yes!" breathed Sven.

"But listen—this here is on your side

of the fence now. Your heart action is too weak, too sluggish to stand an anesthetic now. You almost went out on us for keeps last night, know that? Now that's up to you—I can't do that. Brace up, big boy! Get your heart and blood in shape and we'll have you out of here in two months—and that's no phoney promise. But do your share, or all bets are off."

The blue eyes were fogged again, dull, colorless.

The blunt, blond head rolled around in negation.

"I can't do it. I'm too—tired—Doctor."

Sven's whisper halted and his face became a leaden mask once more. The lieutenant stood up, staring out through the wide windows at the little harbor below, the islands and mountains beyond. He played his first ace.

"Old sailor, aren't you, Sven? Ever been in sail?"

"Ten years," came the just audible whisper.

"Ten years, eh?"

Lieutenant Green drew his breath as a prima donna does before beginning a difficult aria. He scanned the smiling blue bowl of the small harbor, the green and russet of the fir-spiked islands, the purple mountains, silvery snow-caps nudging at the trailing cloud wisps.

"Sven," said the lieutenant slowly, "you can't see it, but out there in the harbor are a half dozen old sailing ships—barks, I guess—I don't know much about the sea. They've had 'em there for years. One of 'em has just been bought, Sven, and they've been putting new rigging on her. For two weeks the crew's been splicing and painting, overhauling her fore and aft. Today—this morning—now—she's pulling out to sea. Got a load of lumber for Japan."

The lieutenant stopped to draw his breath. Sven was staring at him now, a slow flood of faint color creeping into his pallid cheeks. The little lieutenant inhaled deeply and continued. He became romantic, he became poetic, he raved blithely and grandly.

"She's pulling out now, Sven. Pilot's just come aboard and they're walking the capstan—that's what you call it?—they're walking it down. Singing a chantey. Sven, a real, whiskered old-timer. Sounds to me like 'Abel Brown the Sailor!' "

He stopped, and at the risk of giving pneumonia to the rest of the ward, flung open the big windows in back of the sick man. All the scents of the spring morning came in—the rich, heavy scent of the fresh, wet earth, the tang of the firs, the smart of the salt; and with them the lower, minor chanting of the toiling sailors on the forecastle-head of the rejuvenated bark.

"Hear it, Sven?"

"Yes, Doctor."

Where they were they could even catch the *clack* of the pawls now and a few words of the age-old chantey. Sven did his best to sit up.

"Naw, dat ain't 'Abel Brown,' Doc. That's 'Rollin' Down t' Rio.' "

The lieutenant looked down at him. The flush of color was fading from the bony cheeks, like a wave withdrawing from a beach. The blunt head canted over, so that the lieutenant could look full into the tired blue eyes. Almost breathlessly he continued:

"The hooks are clear now, Sven, and the tug's made fast for'ard. They're at the braces now, Sven, making sail on her."

The faded blue eyes still stared unblinkingly up at him. The lieutenant paused, awaiting his climax. Then:

"Too bad you can't see her, Sven. She's quite a sight with all her fresh paint and new suits of sails. It's as bright and clear as a new penny out there, Sven. They've got most of her cloth up now, and the tug's casting off. She's dipping her flag to Fort Worden, now, Sven. Now she's gone, heeling down like a scared jack-rabbit."

He halted. Sven's eyes had wavered from the lieutenant's face and were looking at the fingers of his hand, where they rested motionless on the coverlet. The doctor continued steadily, mechanically.

"Sven, you want to go out there again —live that life—be a two-fisted jasper among other bad jaspers again? Or do you want to lay up in a seamen's home somewhere and eat the nice little frosted cakes old ladies bring you?"

The big fingers on the coverlet had bunched into a loose knot, and the blue, tired eyes were locking with his again.

"Can—can you stop the pain for a leetle, Doc?"

"No, Sven."

"I don't tink so, den, Doc. I don' care so much as that."

"Want me to do your fighting for you, eh, Sven? Can only fight with your hands, big boy?"

"No, Doc, but I am so tired—up here—"

The broad fingers stroked the pallid forehead. The lieutenant let his glance rest for a moment on the copy of the 'Odyssey' on the table beside him.

"Used to know your Homer, didn't you, Sven?"

"Yes, *Dotor*, long time gone."

"Knew the story of Prometheus, too, then?"

"I—yes, *Dotor.*"

"Listen, Sven. I can't fight for you any more here than I could aboard your ship—*savvy?* You, Sven, got to do it—do it with your brain. Now, you're like Prometheus chained to the rock. Chained by pain, Sven. Only yourself—you, Sven Gjordsen, can sever those links. And only then can I or any one else help you. Get me?"

Sven's fingers lifted slowly from the coverlet and stroked his forehead.

"You mean—fight up dar, Doc? Instead o' wid dese?"

He bunched the big fist, eyes bright and clear again.

"Now you got it, sailor."

"When you can operate, Doc? How soon?"

"In about two weeks, Sven," said the lieutenant, and walked down the ward, feeling a little limp.

THE two stood side by side in the July heat, under the high arch of the front door of the hospital. Sven placed tentative fingers on his shoulder, then swung up the heavy sea-bag in one lithe, smooth movement.

"Well, I guess I goin' shove off, now, Doc."

"Going back to the sea, Sven?"

"For a tam, *Dotor.*"

"And then?"

"Then, Copenhagen an' swallow de anchor, I think."

"Good! Well—"

Long, slim fingers were encompassed in the mighty paw.

"Two ways o' fightin', eh Doc?"

"Two ways, Sven."

"So long, Doc."

"*Au 'voir*, Sven."

He was gone across the porch, then, and down the steps. From the doorway the lieutenant watched him as he swung down the path, sea-bag high, face uplifted to the full splendor of the sun.

A Grandee of Old Spain and the Lesson of Sportsmanship

Don Manuel's Sons

By CLEMENTS RIPLEY

“THE BUTCHER?” Well, coming from Venezuela, you're excusable, I guess. And they told you the story about him shooting his brother, too, didn't they? Shot him in the back in cold blood—wasn't that what you heard? I thought so.

Well, folks don't call him the Butcher here in Quetzalpan. No, I wouldn't say a man would get into trouble on account of it—not directly, that is. But things happen.

We Americans mostly just call him the Old Man. That's safe and easy—worth remembering if you're going to be down here any time. The natives have another name for him, *El Soberbio*—well, you might say, “the Haughty One”—or “Proud” would be better. Because he is proud—proud as Lucifer—but he isn't haughty exactly. There is a difference, if you follow me. It's family pride really—the name of Itorbede.

I don't know if you understand, exactly, how some of these old Spanish families are about that. Now take the Old Man, Don Ramon da Itorbede—if you met him tomorrow he'd be easy as an old shoe, for all he's President of Quetzalpan and has been for fifteen years; which is six years more than any one else has ever been able to hold it. He's like the line I remember from Sunday School back in Vermont: “—vaunteth not himself; is not puffed up.” But let you say something that touched his honor—not that you would do anything of the sort, of course, sir; I'm just supposing—and right away you'd find it wouldn't be Don Ramon you were talking to at all, but the representative of a whole long line of dead people—Itorbedes—clear back to the Flood. And what touches one touches them all.

I think he figures it out something like this: Here he is, the last of the Itorbedes. Now that's an awful load for any human to carry, because he's not only got to take care of his own honor—which is simple for a man like Don Ramon—but the honor of his folks, living and dead, which is a lot more complicated. A load like that don't make a man haughty, sir, or puffed up. It makes him humble—and awful careful.

Spanish family pride—it's about the curiousest thing there is, I guess, and about the most delicate. And Don Ramon is careful of his, like I said. Very careful.

And that's really what made him lay for his brother and shoot him. In the back—yes.

I'd like you to understand how it was a little; and to do that you've got to understand how these folks feel about things—different, kind of, from you or me. And to do that I've got to begin quite a ways back. Well, if you'll bear with me—

Don Ramon was only about sixteen

when I first got to know him, and I wasn't so much older myself. I was a *teniente* in the president's guard. There was a bunch of us had seen some pretty messy fighting in Pablo Gonzales' revolution in Nicaragua the year before, and the Quetzalpan government had offered some of us commissions at a hundred and fifty gold a month, after the bust-up.

It was about four o'clock one hot afternoon when the commandante sent for me, and I remember hustling across the parade ground wondering what sort of trouble I'd laid up for myself now. We were a kind of wild bunch that had come down from Nicaragua, you understand, and—well, you know how it is when you're young and have some fighting to your credit. There were things—

But it wasn't trouble after all. I found the commandante in the veranda with guests—Don Manuel da Itorbede and his two boys.

Although I'd never met Don Manuel before, I'd known him by sight for some time. He was a man you'd remember, with his white hair and mustache and his fine, high-bridged nose. Tall and straight and springy—he was like a sword-blade, somehow.

And the boys were a fine looking pair of youngsters. Ramon was sixteen, a year or so older than his brother. He was sort of quiet and dignified—not stand-offish, you understand, but thoughtful. But the other one, Santiago—say, he was all kid from the word "go." And a handsome rascal! Ramon was good-looking, too—tall and straight like the old gentleman; but the Santiago kid had a smile—well, he had a way with him, that boy. Why he— Oh, well.

It seems that Don Manuel had ridden over to see if I would come and teach his boys pistol shooting.

Now if I say it, I was kind of fancy with a pistol in those days. I'd come down from Nicaragua with a reputation, and once or twice I'd put on an exhibition, off-hand sort of, to amuse the crowd at the café. It was trick stuff, mostly, like a kid would waste his time over, but it appealed to Don Manuel's boys, and nothing would do but I must teach them to do it too. That was the way he put it up to me.

Now I'd come down from Nicaragua with some fighting behind me, and like any kid I was pretty full of the idea that I was a tough *hombre*, so the thought of dry-nursing a couple of youngsters didn't appeal so much. But the way Don Manuel put it it was hard to refuse.

Of course if he wanted me to teach his boys shooting he only had to say so and the commandante would have detailed me for as long as he liked. The Itorbedes were big people in Quetzalpan—great people—and Don Manuel had supported the government when it needed supporting bad. But you would never have known it to hear him talk. You would have thought I would be doing him the greatest favor in the world. Have you ever noticed that that is the way to get people to do things for you—stress what they are going to do for you rather than what you are going to do for them? He never mentioned what I would get out of it, but he got me to say I would come—and I've never regretted it.

The Estancia Itorbede is about twelve miles east of Ciudad Luiz, where we had our garrison—a big, low, square building, built like a fort, as most of them are down here, and there's a very good reason. It's right pretty up there in the foothills and the air is cool, with the tinkle of sheep bells. I rode over the next afternoon and found Don Manuel and the boys came out to the big wooden gate to meet me.

That's a way they have with a guest, these old-time Spaniards, and when he bowed from the waist and said, "Señor, my house is yours. I beg you will honor it for as long as suits your convenience," he meant just that. I know, because I stayed, off and on, for two years.

I'm telling you all this so you'll understand a little what sort of people this Don Ramon, the Butcher, comes from.

Don Manuel took my rein and Santiago held my stirrup and Ramon took my saddle-pockets—not for any lack of house-boys, but to show me that nothing was too good for a guest. And it was then I made my first break.

I suppose I made a lot more in the two years that I lived at the Estancia Itorbede, but if I did I never knew it—not from anything that was said anyway—not after this first time.

You see it's a habit I've had for a long time to see to the stabling of my horse myself. Lots of times the care a horse gets, and his condition, is a mighty important matter to the man that's riding him and, generally speaking, it's a good habit. But of course I wouldn't have dreamed of doing it here if I'd stopped to think.

But I didn't, and when the *mozo* led him off I turned to follow.

Well, you don't do that at a place like the Estancia Itorbede. I saw a queer, blank look come over Don Manuel's face, but it was only for a second. The next it was ironed out smooth as you please.

But young Santiago went dark red and his eyes blazed.

"Do you think this is an inn, sir?" he burst out. "Do you—"

That was as far as he got. Don Manuel only said, "Santiago!"—quietly; but with the look he gave him that was enough.

And then he turned to me and bowed, and, "Señor," he said, "I hope you will pardon my son. He was unpardonable, but he is very young, and he has much to learn. Santiago, your apologies to our guest!"

The boy went redder still and stammered out something. I was sorrier for him than I can tell you, and more than ashamed of myself. I tried to explain that it was only an old habit and that I hadn't meant to seem discourteous or to question their stabling.

Well, Don Manuel heard me, very grave and attentive, and when I had finished he turned to his boys. He said:

"My sons, already we have learned something from our guest. He is exactly right, and the habit he speaks of is a good one for every soldier. Remember it, and after this when you bring a horse in, you, Santiago, and you too, Ramon, remember to see yourself that he is properly taken care of. Now we will go together and see that our guest's horse lacks for nothing."

I think that was carrying it off, sir. And as long as I stayed with them I never knew one of the boys to forget what he told them that day. Well, it's a good habit if I say it myself.

That night at supper I met Doña Isabella and, seeing her, it was easy to see where Santiago got his looks. Of course Doña Isabella was pretty well along by then, but it was plain she'd been easy to look at in her day. She was—well—plump, now, and her little high-heeled shoes were kind of inadequate, and she chattered a good deal about nothing at all, but she was a right sweet lady and crazy about her boys.

Santiago was her favorite, it was easy to see, although I do believe the poor lady tried not to show it. But Santiago had a smile and a way with him—but I guess I told you that before.

Altogether it was a mighty happy sort of family and life at the Estancia was something to look back to. In the mornings Padre Anselmo would ride across the hills from the Espiritu Santo, with his mule bells jingling, to give the boys their lessons, while I loafed in the cool of the *patio* or rode the range with Don Manuel. Or there'd be little things I could do to help him, and it was a pleasure to do them for him.

Then, after dinner and siesta, we'd have the other things, like pistol shooting or riding or fencing—I wasn't much help there, but Don Manuel could do things with a sword you wouldn't believe—and in the evenings we'd talk or play chess in the *patio*.

I learned chess from Don Manuel, but I never got so I could beat him; and Ramon could beat me two out of three games too. But young Santiago was easy pickings after I'd learned to handle him. He'd come down the board with everything at once in a quick, slashing attack that took all you had to keep up with it. But once let something go wrong and he was gone—went all to pieces—and you had him cold.

It used to make him pretty mad to have me beat him, too. More than once I've seen him go dark red and his mouth twist up on one side in an ugly way he had sometimes. But he never actually said anything. That first time, about the horse, was the only time he really let himself loose with me. He had a mean temper, but he'd learned to sweat it when his father was around.

I remember one night when I'd taken his queen due to his own carelessness—he was liable to be overconfident—he quit the game then and there and stalked off to his room. It troubled the old gentleman, I could see. I think Santiago's temper was the one thing in the world that really worried him. I don't suppose it ever occurred to him that an Itorbede could lie or cheat or do a dirty trick, but self-control was his pet hobby and he was always preaching it to the boys.

It made it all the worse I think, because I have an idea that in his heart Santiago was his favorite, too. Ramon was the wheel-horse, the dependable one, and he knew it. But Santiago was like his mother.

He didn't speak of it until Ramon had gone to bed, and then he didn't name any names. He wouldn't have been likely to do that—criticizing Santiago, you understand—even to me. He had a way of treating those boys with the same courtesy he would a man of his own age—and he wouldn't have criticized one of his friends behind his back would he?

But I knew what he was driving at when he said—

"Do you know, my friend, I have sometimes thought that the man who has the one quality of self-control has the basis of all the others."

He paused a little and then went on, almost as if he was talking to himself:

"Wealth may be lost, an honorable name may be disgraced, but the man who can handle himself as he would a sword or a horse, who can make himself do the thing that is necessary to be done although he is tired, or afraid—or angry—that man can do anything! And there, it seems to me, is the difference between the gentleman and any one else. It is not a matter of birth or position or manners, but of self-mastery—self-training."

That surprized me a little, because he took great pride in his family. But later I understood. Being an Itorbede was a privilege to him, but it was an obligation too, and a heavy one. You have to understand that to understand him—and Ramon.

I knew, of course, that he was thinking of Santiago, and in a way it put it up to me, for by now I was doing a deal more than teaching them to shoot. I was helping to bring them up, and it was getting to be a lot more responsible job than I'd ever imagined. You see, I'd never handled kids before. But I'd handled a good many colts, and it's surprizing how much the same it is. Lots of patience and lots of firmness, and if you start anything, make it stick. Well, you can do it, but there'll be times when they'll have you worried, especially a boy like Santiago. Take something that happened about the pistol shooting.

The kid picked it up in a minute, you might say, like he did everything else. By the time he'd been at it a month he was doing shooting that would surprize you, and crazy to try the trick stuff—rolling them and all like that. Quick, he was—quick as a flash.

Ramon was slower and he didn't have a natural shooting eye. But he worked at it. He'd spend hours snapping an empty pistol, practising the trigger squeeze like I'd showed him. But none of that for Santiago. He'd give him a laugh and swagger up to the line and shoot circles 'round him. I never saw a better natural shot.

And Ramon never seemed to mind. Anything Santiago did was just about perfect to him anyway. He hated bad enough to be beaten by any one else, though he always took it well, but when the kid out-shot him he was as tickled, seemed like, as if he'd made a record himself.

For the first couple of months I never let them shoot in competition—always managed it so they couldn't get to it on even terms and call it a fair test. It's best to handle beginners like that, I think. Makes them think more about form and less about results. But one afternoon I told them we'd put on a friendly little match.

Santiago stepped up first, gay and careless, and shot a string that would have done credit to a man who'd been at it a lot longer than he had. His last two rounds he shot from the hip, although I hadn't started them on that yet. Showing off, of course, like a kid. But he made a good score, I'll give him that.

Then Ramon came on, slow and thoughtful, and doing just what he'd been taught—and what did he do but shoot a better string still!

Well, I was surprized, but it looked like a chance to drive an idea home, so I said to Santiago:

"Now you see what practise and doing things the right way will do for you, son. It's worth remembering."

But the boy wasn't listening. His face was flushed and his mouth was twisted up in that ugly way he had when he was crazy mad.

"It was a trick," he yelled. "He got me off my guard when I wasn't doing my best. He can't do it again."

Ramon didn't say a word—just stood there with his pistol in his hand, looking as if he was ashamed of himself. It made me a little hot. I said:

"Myself, I think you could shoot a better string if you would watch what you were doing and not try to show off so much. But if you think he can't do it again there's one sure way to find out—Ramon, you shoot first this time so there won't be any question."

The boy looked unhappy as he stood up to the line, and I think he would have given a good deal to make a poor showing and let his brother win. I wondered if he would miss on purpose.

Not Ramon. There wasn't anything but straight stuff there. He was there to shoot and he was going to shoot his best no matter how much he hated to beat Santiago. Whatever game that boy played he played right up to the handle. And he shot a little better score than last time.

Then it was Santiago's turn, and there was nothing careless about him this time. He came up with his teeth set hard and his mouth twisted, and I thought to myself—

"Now there's going to be some pretty rotten shooting."

And I was right. His first two were

clean misses, then he clipped the edge, and then he missed again and cracked up altogether and threw his gun down and started to walk away.

Ramon went after him and put his arm around him and told him it was a fluke—that he must be sick—anything to buck him up, but all it seemed to do was to make him madder. Santiago threw off the arm and left the poor youngster standing there, sick and miserable, and grabbed up his gun.

"You think you're a better shot, eh?" He jerked the words out between his teeth. "All right—stand there then and I'll stand here, and let him—" he snapped his thumb at me—"let him give the word. We'll see if I'm afraid of your shooting! Get ready!"

And he'd have done it, too. I do believe he'd have shot Ramon then and there, or tried to, if I hadn't knocked the gun out of his hand.

"You ornery little devil!" I yelled. "If you ever try a trick like that again I'll take a stick and whale you till you won't sit down for a week."

I was mad, you see—and scared.

He went dead white and his eyes blazed. He shook so I thought he was going to faint.

"You would dare!" he said almost in a whisper.

"I would," I said, and I guess I looked as if I meant it. "I would, and I will! Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

For a second I thought he was going to jump me, and it would have been a relief if he had, although I don't guess Don Manuel would ever have forgiven me. There are some things the pride of the Itorbedes won't stand, even with as fine an old sportsman as he was— But he didn't. He drew a queer, hissing breath through his teeth and walked away.

I made Ramon finish out his practise, thinking it would steady him down and take his mind off things; but I needn't have worried about steadying that boy. He shot out his string, careful and thoughtful, like always, and all the time his face was like death. He made good scores, too.

Going back he said:

"Please, you will not tell my father, sir? It would distress him so—and he might blame my brother—"

Well, to my mind nothing would have done that young devil so much good as to have somebody take a hickory and wear him out, but Ramon was so pitiful about it I had to promise not to say anything.

But it got out—at least some of it did. Santiago didn't come down to supper that night and neither did Donna Isabella, and I suppose he told her his side and she sympathized with him. She generally did, and who could blame her? She was his mother and he was an awful winning kid.

But I think they got mighty little change out of Don Manuel this time. He went up after a little to see what was keeping them and he came down alone, and all through supper he looked worried and troubled.

We played chess after, and when Ramon had gone up we sat out under the stars for a long time without saying much. I knew he was hurt and bothered, but I didn't know what to say. And there was my promise to Ramon.

He finally brought it up himself—not directly, you understand; he never criticized his boys or talked over their failings behind their backs. But I think I told you that.

There was a big red star that used to come up over the living wing on summer nights, and the old gentleman used to like to watch for it. He was looking at it now, and I never saw it bigger or brighter, but I don't think he was really seeing it at all.

"One thing in particular you North Americans have," he was saying, "that I could wish we Latins might learn from you. I speak, my friend, of your love of the sport—the game for its own sake."

He was quiet for a little bit and his face was thoughtful. Then he went on:

"We have our games, of course, our sword-play, our *jai alai*. But the essential thing, the sport, we do not have. We must have more than the game—

a stake, perhaps—applause. And above all, we Latins, we must win."

He hesitated as if he didn't quite know how to put what he wanted to say, and then, after a little he went on again.

"Perhaps that is our real trouble. We can win graciously—more so, perhaps, than your North Americans. You will not be offended, my friend? But we can not lose at all. We must have our excuses—claim foul—what-not. And because we have the dramatic instinct, we of the South, we must turn an honorable defeat into a slur on our honor."

Up to then he'd been speaking slowly, as if he'd been thinking out loud, but now he turned to me directly.

"Señor," he said, "no man may escape his fate. Some day my sons must play a part in the history of their country, and it will not be a small part, for they are Itorbedes. I do not speak boastingly as I think you know, but in all seriousness and humbleness. Señor, if my boys could learn to be the sportsmen, to master themselves, to win without triumph and lose without bitterness, but win or lose, to play their game out to the end and play it hard—I think it might mean very much to Quetzalpan some day. And because you are my friend, who will understand, I tell you this and ask you to help me."

Maybe it sounds funny, hearing me tell it, but it wasn't funny then, seeing that lean, straight old gentleman with his fine face, grave under the stars. And remembering, it isn't funny to me now.

I said:

"Don Manuel, you do me honor. I count it an honor to be called your friend and a very great honor to be asked to help you. And I will do my best."

Well, it sounds better in Spanish.

It was young Santiago he meant, of course. Ramon was the wheelhorse, like I said. But it was hard to know just how to begin. Maybe if we'd come down harder on him—but you just couldn't. Take the next morning—he came down with his arm around Ramon and the two of them as happy as if they'd just found each other after being separated for a year. Santiago just didn't know how to hold a grudge.

But if he could forget a grudge, he didn't forget an apology—of a sort, that is. I guess he just couldn't bring himself to say it in words. About three weeks later I found a horse-hair bridle on the carved chest in my room. No word to say who it was from, but it had my initials woven into the *conchas*, and I knew he'd made it himself—he was clever with his fingers. I've got it yet. A winning kid!

Well, we did what we could, Don Manuel and I. I sent off for some boxing gloves, for one thing, and started them off on the theory that the lad who can take a bang in the jaw and hold his temper has learned a good deal. I remember how tickled Don Manuel used to be to watch them mauling each other around. I can see him yet, tugging at his little white imperial and chuckling.

"In the slats!" he'd say, "In the slats!"

I think he thought it was a technical boxing term.

But poor Doña Isabella used to get right distressed. She never could get over thinking that to hit a man was to insult him.

I never could get Santiago over shutting his eyes when he saw a fast one coming, though. It wasn't lack of nerve—he could take punishment. It just seemed to be instinctive. I recall one time—

But I guess I'm talking too much. When I get to thinking about Don Manuel and those boys and the days at the Estancia it seems I get carried out of myself. Happy days, they were—clean, fine days.

Well, everything has to end, I suppose, and almost before I knew it it was time for the boys to go to France. Don Manuel had had his education at the military academy at St. Cyr, and of course his sons must go there too. They were to be soldiers, of course, being Itorbedes, and besides, it's the only way into official life here in Quetzalpan.

I rode over to say good-by, and I recall the curious feeling it gave me to think that tonight Ramon and Santiago would be gone and there'd be nobody to play chess in the *patio* and see the big red star rise but Don Manuel and me. It made me feel kind of old.

Doña Isabella had kissed them and prayed over them and gone to bed with a sick headache, poor lady, but their father was there at the gate to see them off. I had brought along a couple of little tricks I'd got them for going away presents—a field glass for Ramon and a combination watch-compass for Santiago. Ramon thanked me, grave and courteous, like always, and Santiago flushed up with that quick, warm smile he had. A sweet kid he was.

It made a fine picture when they turned to take leave of their father—the tall, straight old gentleman and his strong, clean-cut sons, and the gracefulness and dignity of it all. High-schooled thoroughbreds they were—all three.

And then, right in the middle of his little formal speech of leave-taking I heard Ramon's voice shake a little and suddenly Don Manuel opened his arms wide and caught them up to him, and—

"My sons!" he said. "My sons—"

And then he straightened again and said—

"Go with God and come home with honor."

They rode out of the big gate and down over the hill, and that evening, sitting in the *patio*, we didn't have much to say, Don Manuel and me— Nice boys they were—nice boys.

Well, things went about as usual in Quetzalpan for the next four years. There were the usual Indian troubles up East from time to time, and duty of one sort or another kept me on the move. And we had an election, too, the third year, that brought back the same government but stirred up a lot of uneasiness. Pedro Morales, the defeated candidate, went off to Venezuela, and from time to time we'd hear that he was getting backing to come back and start a revolution.

Don Manuel spoke of it once when I'd ridden over from Ciudad Luiz to hear the news of the boys and chat with him a little. He recalled what he'd said that night four years before—the night after the pistol match.

"That is the Latin of it, my friend," he said. "Pedro Morales is brave. I know that who was in action with him in the days when we rode against Gomez. And he is a man of honor. But—he is not the sportsman. He must win, and so, perhaps, my country must go through another time of blood and fire and bitterness because Pedro Morales has not learned that there is no sting in an honorable defeat. Perhaps if he had learned the boxing, eh, my friend? But you—you do not ride twelve miles in the heat to hear me chatter of Morales. Wait now—here is something!"

His face lighted up and he dug out a letter.

"From the commandant at St. Cyr, who was my classmate—read there what he says of Ramon—and there of Santiago. My boys! Wild a little, perhaps, that Santiago, but—so was I." He wagged his head happily. "My sons—and now in a little half year they come home. Who knows, with boys like that in the saddle—sportsmen—there may yet be brighter days for Quetzalpan, eh, my friend? But come, let me show you what I have for them. A surprize."

We went out to the stables and saw as pretty a pair of imported Arabs as a man could dream of. Don Manuel fussed around them like a mother hen and picked up their feet and pretended to find dirt in their pasterns, all the time bubbling over with happiness.

"Up to the weight, do you think? Ramon writes that he has grown an inch, you know. And the black— A little weedy, perhaps?"

I laughed.

"Don Manuel," I said, "you're trying to tease a compliment out of me. Well, you won't. I think the black has a bog spavin and the gray is knee sprung and they're both past mark of mouth. How's that?"

Then he laughed and clapped me on the shoulder.

"I am an old fool about my boys," he told me, "and I think you are as bad. Come—we will go to the house and drink a bottle of wine and be as foolish as we please, for in a little half year now they are coming home."

But I missed the homecoming after all. I had to be up East, and they'd been back for a month when I rode into Ciudad Luiz again, dirty and dry and stopped at the Cafe del Soldado to wash the road dust out of my throat before I went back to my quarters to clean up.

There was the usual four o'clock in the afternoon crowd milling around the bar, and then, all alone at a little table, with a glass of *aguardiente* in front of him, I saw Santiago.

It made me feel queer to see him there—he'd been such a kid when he left. But a youngster ages a lot in a few years sometimes.

I came up behind and dropped my hand on his shoulder.

"Hello, young 'un," I said. "Gosh, it's good to see you. Where's Ramon?"

He had whirled around, startled, but when he saw me he said something or other and got up and held out his hand. It struck me queer, the way he did it. Oh, he was polite and glad to see me all right, but I'd been looking for that quick smile of his and it wasn't there.

And then I saw what it was. The kid was drunk.

Now I'm no sob-sister; and if getting drunk—and I mean flop-eared drunk—was the worst I'd ever done, my conscience wouldn't worry me any. A young fellow is liable to bust loose sometimes and it doesn't do any particular harm that I can see, if he doesn't do it too often.

But someway it was different with Don Manuel's boys. I told myself that Santiago wasn't a kid any more, that he was old enough to run his own concerns, and that anyway his getting a little liquored wasn't anything to go up in the air about. I recalled that when Don Manuel had told me he was a little wild we had both laughed. But just the same, seeing it right here in front of me, it wasn't anything to laugh about. I said:

"Look here, son, let's get out. You come with me while I get cleaned up and then we'll get Ramon, if he's in town, and ride out and see your father. I want to see if he can still stay on the ground since you two young devils came home. Say, you'd have died to see him fussing over those two horses of yours—brushing their teeth night and morning, I'll bet—" and I had him half-way across the street, rattling on about anything at all to get him to come when all of a sudden he jerked loose without a word and turned and started back to the café.

I was surprized, because drunk as he was, I hadn't supposed he'd forget his manners—unless he was mad, and I didn't see what I could have said to make him that. I went after him.

"Hey, young 'un," I said, "what's the idea? Forget something?"

He turned, and very quietly he said:

"I do not wish to offend, señor, but I should be grateful if you would go your way and leave me alone." And then he added, as if he was trying to hold in, "You'll be glad enough to, no doubt, after you have seen my father."

It was like a slap across the mouth. "What did you say?" I asked him. "Your father—"

"I think you heard me," he said, and he was holding on to himself hard. "My father will tell you, no doubt. My father is—my father—" And then suddenly he went all to pieces. "—— him!" he screamed, "I'll show him. I'll make the name of Itorbede stink from one end of Quetzalpan to the other—the ——, stiff-necked old fool!"

Well, sir, I stood there, and I remember telling myself that it couldn't be real, and smelling the hot asphalt outside the café and hearing the clink of glasses inside and trying not to believe it. And he went on and on until finally I came to and grabbed him.

"Quit it!" I yelled. "You don't know what you're saying. Quit!"

You see, sir—I don't know if I could make you see. I'm not a religious man, but to hear somebody talk like that about Don Manuel—why it was like blasphemy—the worst kind. And his own son!

"For God's sake stop!" I said. "I won't have it—you hear me!"

That turned him on to me.

"Then mind your own business," he snarled.

By then I'd begun to get over the first shock of it, and I'd begun to get mad. I gripped his elbow and swung him around.

"Look here, son," I told him, "don't you go losing your temper with me because you're losing it with the wrong man. And as to this being my business, when I hear any one talk like that about Don Manuel I'll make it my business. You're drunk and not responsible or I'd knock you endways right now. Now you can turn 'round and march up to my quarters with me or I'll make you do it anyway and take what's left of you along. Understand?"

That seemed to sober him a little. He was sullen and hard and wouldn't talk, but he came. I got him home and he crumpled up on my bed as if he'd been hit by lightning. He was a lot drunker than I'd realized.

I got his boots off and his collar undone before the door burst open and Ramon charged in. He was in uniform, the uniform of the president's guards, but we were both too excited to speak of that just then.

"My brother," he gasped. "Santiago—they said you had him."

"He's in the back room," I told him. "Now get hold of yourself and try to tell me what it's all about."

I never heard exactly how it happened and I never wanted to, but it seemed that the general line of the thing was that there had been some kind of a mix-up on the final exams at St. Cyr, and Santiago had been caught cheating. That lost him his certificate, of course, and the school authorities had had to write and explain why.

"He didn't mean it," Ramon kept telling me. "We stood at the head of the class, he and I. You know how quick he is—how fast he learns; and he wanted so to be at the very head—ahead of me. It would have pleased my father so. Oh, you must understand how he wanted to please my father. And he would have stood first—I am sure of that. He was always the quick one, you know. And he couldn't have known what he was doing. He had been drinking, I think, and he didn't realize—"

"Never mind that," I cut in, for as soon as he'd said that about the head of the class I knew what the trouble was. Santiago had to win. "What about your father?" I asked, for that was what worried me.

He drew a long breath.

"It was terrible," he said. "I have never seen my father like that before. His face—he told my brother he had disgraced a name that had never had a stain on it in eight hundred years. He said that he would never call him his son again—that he would send him an allowance through the bank here at Ciudad Luiz, but he never wanted to see his face or hear his name spoken as long as he lived."

That was Don Manuel. He might disown the boy, but it wasn't in him not to provide for him. Handsomely too, I found out later.

Ramon said:

"I talked to him. I begged him to understand. I even quarreled with him—" And that meant something, for it took nerve for one of his sons to stand up to Don Manuel where his honor was concerned. "Oh, perhaps if you went—you are very dear to his heart, sir."

Well, it would have been hard to refuse, I think. And there was Don Manuel to think of—and Santiago, the poor, likable kid— I nodded.

"I'll do what I can," I said. "Wait till I change my clothes."

Don't make any mistake; there was nothing but clear stuff to Ramon—the Butcher you called him just now. But when I said that he leaned over and kissed my hand where it rested on the table. I jerked it back. All I could say was—

"Keep a hold on yourself, young 'un."

Did I say it took nerve to stand up to Don Manuel? I think what I did that night was the bravest thing I ever did—and I have the Great Star of Quetzalpan—not meaning to boast, you understand.

When Doña Isabella found out why I'd come she went all to pieces. And Don Manuel was shut up in his room and would see no one.

"He'll see me, I think," I told her as soon as I could get in a word, and I went on up without waiting to be announced.

I knew that big, cool room well, with the high, arched doorways and the crossed duelling swords, and the cabinet where he kept the orders and decorations of ten generations of dead Itorbedes—the Golden Fleece among them. He took a lot of pride in those decorations, and who wouldn't?

I found him in his big, high-backed chair by the window. It wasn't like him to be indoors a fine day like this, but they told me he hardly ever stepped out now. And I believed after I saw him about men aging overnight. His face was gray and lined, and he moved old.

"Señor," he said drearily, "you meant well, and I would not seem discourteous, but I must ask to be excused. I—I am not well."

I'll not deny I felt a little shaky—well, more than a little, but I said:

"Don Manuel, you have more than once done me the honor to call me your friend. Friends are to turn to in time of trouble."

You see that put it up to him to stick to what he'd said about my being his friend, or be really discourteous. And I knew Don Manuel.

He frowned, but he said:

"Perhaps I have been forgetful. Sit down, my friend."

I plunged right at it.

"Don Manuel," I said, "I've come to see you about your son, Santiago."

He lifted his head.

"I have no son, Santiago," he said harshly, and his look didn't encourage me to go on.

But I'd promised Ramon. I took a deep breath and:

"Don Manuel," I said, "you will pardon me, but you have a son, Santiago, and he never needed you more than at this minute. Don Manuel," I went on, before he could stop me, "if a high-strung, high-bred colt goes wrong in his first race do you turn him out of your stables? Sell him to the bull-ring?"

He half rose out of his chair and his eyes blazed.

"If he shows the cur strain—if he disgraces his breeding and tradition—yes!" he thundered. "And be advised, señor, I do it without advice or interference from my friends."

"Then," I said, and I tried to keep my voice steady, for I was in it now and going to see it through, "then you have changed mightily, Don Manuel. There was a man I knew who would have taken that colt and studied him, worked him, handled him, gentled him—gentled him, I say, Don Manuel, until he made him a great horse or knew the reason why."

I think it had been a long time since any one stood up to the old gentleman. He was out of his chair and across the room in three strides, and he didn't look old to me then. He looked dangerous.

"Señor!" he said, "señor—you are going too far!"

"I'm going farther," I told him, and I smiled. Looking back now I'd give something to know how I did it. "I'm going to tell you that there was a time when you did a deal of talking about sportsmanship—about losing without bitterness. Must you win too, Don Manuel? Or can you teach that boy to take his licking and start again and play the game hard?"

I knew that would hit him if I ever got a chance to say it, and I knew I had touched him when he turned slowly and walked to the window and stood looking out with his back to me. I drove at him again, and if I was rough with him God knows I meant it for the best.

I said:

"Because if you can't there are others who can. You taught Ramon something about sportsmanship, and let me tell you, Don Manuel, you taught me. And so, while you're sulking here in your room it may be some consolation to know that we haven't forgotten your teaching if you have. And we'll be proud of that boy before we're through with him."

It seemed a long time before he turned, and when he did he looked old still—old and hurt—but there was a queer look of happiness in his face too. I think he had wanted to be convinced right along.

He said slowly:

"My very dear friend, sometimes a man is an old fool, and then he is lucky to have a friend who will tell him so. Will you bring my boy home to me?"

And so Santiago came home. I didn't quite like the way he took it—a little defiant and sullen at first—but I knew that would wear off. He was a likable kid who couldn't hold a grudge, and besides, no one could be with Don Manuel long and be anything but decent.

I will say for him that he took it pretty well, seeing Ramon in uniform and all. It must have been hard, although no one could have tried more than Ramon to make it easy for him. I think he would have stayed away from the Estancia altogether except that that would have made it all the more pointed. Santiago could stand anything better than pity.

As it was, we didn't get over often in the next few months, for things were beginning to get uneasy in Quetzalpan.

And then Pedro Morales came back from Venezuela.

You wouldn't remember what happened then, I guess? Well, naturally not. It wouldn't have raised much of a ripple up North. But from the point of view of the men who had to fight it, it was just about as nasty and dangerous a campaign as you'd want to miss anywhere.

It broke so suddenly that there wasn't even a chance to ride over and say good-by to Don Manuel. I never saw him again, but I saw Santiago—once.

We'd heard of him before that. First we heard that he'd joined Morales—had a commission. I knew how that would hurt the old gentleman. He was staunch Federal and had fought for the government in his early days and supported it with cash and influence later. And he had mighty little sympathy with Morales—but I think I told you that.

I understood, myself. It was the old trouble—the kid had to win. If Ramon was with the Federals, Santiago would have to join up with the rebels and take a chance of coming out ahead after all. It made me heart-sick for Don Manuel, but I couldn't blame the boy, the way things were.

Then we heard he'd been captured in the fighting around Juarez and released on parole never to take up arms against the government again. That was a special favor to Don Manuel, of course, and I knew how that proud old gentleman must have hated to ask it. But at least it was a relief to have him out of the fighting for good, because the revolution was beginning to crumple up by then and it looked bad for Morales's gang.

I recollect we left San Jose on the morning of the fourth of April—hot and dusty and dry it was, with the grass all burned brown and the leaves limp on the trees. And the third day of the march we began to meet refugees going to the rear. Patient, brown old people, they were, and kids, with their little bundles—pitiful, no account stuff—trudging along with their faces streaked with dust or sitting by the road watching us go past. And up ahead as we got farther into the country, you could see the smoke rolling into the hot sky from burning farms and towns, where the rebels were devastating the country behind them.

It all made me think of what Don Manuel had said once about Quetzalpan having to go through another time of blood and fire because Pedro Morales couldn't take his licking like a man. Oh, well, war is a rotten business. It's been my bread and butter for a good many years and I oughtn't to kick, but it's a nasty business all the same.

It was on the sixth day, as we were coming into San Jacinto, which isn't but a dozen miles as the crow flies from the Estancia Itorbede, that the rebels began to stiffen up and offer us a fight.

I'd been detached three days before as a despatch rider, and as such the fight was none of my business. Battles are no treat to me, and I was satisfied to watch this one from a hill a good ways back.

It was about like any other muss. You couldn't see the enemy, and our own men were just a thin brown line thrown out across brown hills, moving forward so slow they didn't look to be moving at all. And there was a ragged rattle, like dropping peas in a tin pan, and a smell of hot dust. Not much to it, but I guess the men that died there are just as dead as the ones that died at Waterloo.

By four o'clock our advance had reached the edge of town and the rebels were beginning to stream out the other side, and by dark, when I rode in, it was all over but some scattering shots where they'd find some of them hiding in a cellar or a loft or somewhere.

But there were plenty of signs that there'd been some very messy street fighting. I recollect I ran into Johnny Henderson—he came down from Nicaragua when I did—with a four-inch crack in his head where a woman had heaved a roof-tile on to him. He was hunting a dressing station and he told me Ramon was at the Hotel Central in charge of the town as provost marshal. That was good hearing because I knew he'd been in some of the worst of the fighting.

I went around to the Hotel Central and found him in the office, with a gang of prisoners waiting in the hall, taking them one by one.

"Here, young 'un," I told, for I'd been through it plenty of times before, "take 'em in bunches. You'll be all night this way."

It's the meanest job in the army, I think—provost marshal. Your men bring in the prisoners, wounded some of them, and if they look like rebels you order them shot, and if not, you might as well, because if your men aren't better in hand than South American troops generally are after taking a town, their chances of getting out alive are pretty thin anyway. Mind, I don't hold with shooting prisoners myself, but it's the way the folks down here run their revolutions. Which being the case, the quicker you can get it over with the better to my way of thinking.

But Ramon thought different. He was a careful, thorough youngster, you know, and sooner than chance anybody getting knocked off by mistake he took each one separately and went into the case fully—and got about the same result as if he'd taken them all at once. I could see it was making him pretty sick, but it was his job and the boy stayed with it.

And then the door opened and they brought in Santiago.

I think he knew who he was going to find, for he didn't look surprized or worried. He just shrugged his shoulders and stood waiting.

It's queer how your mind works. I remember in that minute before any one spoke or moved I was thinking that the big clock on the wall had a bullet-hole through it and the glass was all broken, and how some decent fellow had worked to make that clock and some one else had taken thought to hang it there, and right then I was thoroughly fed up on war.

And then Ramon said—

"But your parole—you gave your parole!" in a voice not much louder than a whisper, and I came to my senses.

"Of course he gave his parole," I said quickly, before Santiago could say anything, "so that's all right, because if he was paroled he couldn't be fighting, could he?" I stopped and ordered the guard outside and then I rattled on, "He rode over on business this morning, and when the fighting started why he had to stop and see it, which was a kid's trick and might have got him into trouble. But that's how it was and I'll swear to that in any court you please. Wasn't that it, Santiago?"

The kid was jaunty. He lighted a cigaret and flicked the match into a corner and grinned.

"It would be the height of discourtesy to doubt your word, sir," he said easily, and I breathed free.

"There!" I told Ramon. "That settles that. Now write him a pass and let him get going, for San Jacinto is going to be a bad town tonight."

I should have known Ramon better. His face was gray and he was leaning back, gripping the edge of the table, but his voice was steady, and he said—

"He has been fighting!"

And that was all.

Well, I knew that, of course. He was sweaty and powder-blackened and his eyes had the look of fighting. You can always tell.

But I didn't understand. I thought Ramon hadn't caught on to what I was trying to do. And I guess Santiago thought so too, for he smiled—not that quick, warm smile of his at all, but different—nasty, and he said—

"You are slow tonight, my brother—slower than usual."

Well, that was yellow, that dig at Ramon because he didn't pick things up so fast. But Santiago had been beaten again. Maybe that made him more excusable.

Ramon drew a long breath, and he looked very sick. And then, quietly, he said:

"He has been fighting again, and he has broken his parole." He stopped a moment, and then he said, "I'm sorry, brother."

Santiago's cigaret fell to the floor and he went white.

I went cold.

"Are you crazy?" I gasped. "Nobody knows but us, and I'll swear to what I said just now till I'm black in the face. Hurry up now and write that pass and let him get started."

The first shock had hit Santiago pretty hard, but with that he perked up enough for another nasty crack—

"Yes, don't be afraid, Ramon, it won't get out and hurt your career."

The look Ramon gave him put me in mind of that day of the pistol match—pitiful. He didn't say anything, but I did.

"You say anything more like that and I'll bat your teeth down your throat," I told him. "Now look here, Ramon, you can't do this thing. Think, man—think of your father."

That was a mistake.

"What would he do in my place?" he flashed at me.

"His own son? He'd let him go," I lied. "Of course he would."

He looked at Santiago and he drew a long, shuddering breath, and I said—

"He would, Ramon—I swear he would."

For a moment I thought he was going to give in. Then he looked straight at me and he said—

"You know he would not."

His mouth was all twisted the way you'll see a man's sometimes that's been badly wounded after the first shock has passed and he knows he's got to stand it.

But I wasn't going to stand it. I said:

"You can't do this thing—you can't! You've done your duty and you're clear. Now I order you to write that pass, and I'll take the responsibility."

I don't know why I hadn't thought of that before.

"I'm senior here, and that's an order," I backed it up, and I heard Santiago catch his breath like a sob. Ramon stared at me, and he looked frightened.

I think now he was frightened—of himself. And then he shook his head.

"It is true, sir, that you are senior," he said slowly, as if he was thinking it out as he went along. "But I am provost marshal of San Jacinto—and no one can take that responsibility for me." And then, so low that I hardly heard it, "But it is very hard."

Well, he was right, of course. As a dispatch rider I didn't have any authority over the provost marshal. The best I could do was to lean forward in time to catch Santiago and prop a chair under him.

Now understand me, that boy was no coward. I've seen the idea of a firing squad take too many brave men that way—men who'd fight their weight in wild-cats. It's the feeling of helplessness, I think.

But Ramon couldn't understand, alalthough I tried to tell him. You see, he was all keyed up to going through with it, and now this new development, the idea of Santiago cracking up before the firing squad, was almost too much for him.

"To hear he died like this—" he whispered. "It will kill my father. Dear God, I didn't know it would be like this!"

"Oh, young 'un," I said, "if you'd only see reason—"

He shook his head, and I saw it was no use. He'd have taken the boy's place gladly, I think, but he wouldn't let him go. I said what I could to comfort him. I told him we'd fill the kid up with brandy and pull him through decently some way. I was honestly sorrier for him than for Santiago just then. He was numb, and I don't think he knew what was going on.

I recollect seeing his cigaret still smoldering on the floor and putting my foot on it and having some wild idea of drawing a gun and forcing Ramon to see reason. Foolishness, of course. You can't force a boy like Ramon where his honor is concerned. I'd have had to kill him.

And then I had a flash, a long shot, but I was trying anything.

I knew Donna Isabella was at Ciudad Luiz, not more than fifteen miles away, to be out of harm's way in case there was trouble at the Estancia—not that that was likely so long as Morales's crowd knew Don Manuel was there to defend it. They knew him and they weren't looking for that kind of a muss. I said:

"Ramon, if you're bound to do this, for the love of pity, give the boy a chance to see his mother and say good-by. You owe her that much, and he'll give you his word to be back in time for—in the morning. You can't decently do less than that."

I specified Donna Isabella because I knew that once she got her hands on him, no matter what he'd promised, or what he'd intended when he promised it, he'd never come back. Don Manuel would have brought him back himself if he thought there was a chance of him breaking his word, but his mother—well, she was a right sweet lady, but she saw things different.

My only hope was that Ramon wouldn't see that, and it was a slim one. But sometimes a boy doesn't quite see that sort of thing about his mother or his brother. It's a good thing, I guess.

Santiago was beginning to come to himself. I heard him draw a quick breath between his teeth and saw him stiffen. It's very horrible to see a man the way he was. I've never been able to get used to it.

All the time I'd been talking Ramon had been standing there, with that awful, thoughtful quietness in his face. When I finished he said slowly, "Yes, I think that will be best," and Santiago went limp.

Ramon sat down and wrote a pass, and then he looked at his watch and said—

"There will be a horse for you outside the Church of the Concepción in half an hour," and handed the pass across the table.

I knew he didn't trust himself to say any more.

Neither of us spoke for a moment after Santiago went out. Then Ramon said:

"I have a duty. Will you ride with me? I'd—I'd like you to." And I said, "Good God, boy, you couldn't lose me now!"

I was weak and light-headed with the relief of it and thinking how near it had been. Well, you'd have felt the same if you'd known Santiago.

I had supposed we were going to make

an inspection tour, and I was surprized when we rode out north on the Ciudad Luiz road. But I guessed that he wanted to have a last look at his brother. I knew he hadn't been able to trust himself to say good-by back there in San Jacinto.

About two miles this side of town there is a cut. Maybe you noticed it coming up. Well, you probably wouldn't at that. When we got there he turned off the road and said—

"We'll stop here a little if you are willing."

We dismounted and he led the horses off a little and picketed them, and we sat down on the edge of the cut overlooking the road. It was moonlight, bright as day, I remember, and the road was white and the hills were all black and silver, and there was a smell of hot, dry earth.

Up to now Ramon hadn't said twenty words, but now he turned and asked—

"Do you think my brother means to come back?"

I told you I was light-headed. I said:

"Not if he's got the sense I think he has. Did you think he'd be fool enough for that?"

He said:

"No, I don't think so. I know my brother."

His voice was low and perfectly steady now and something about it made me go cold all over. And just then we heard hoofbeats, coming from San Jacinto.

His head went up—listening. I said, "Here he comes!" and the hoofbeats were louder and plainer. Then they came into the far end of the cut and I saw his face in the moonlight.

You've seen these old Toltec images you find sometimes in a ruined temple back in the jungle? It was like that, old and hard and cold, and somehow, all of a sudden, I knew that whatever happened, this thing wasn't my business any more. It was something old—so old that I couldn't understand it even. Something that was old when the Itorbedes went out to the Crusades. And I kept still.

Then the boy came in sight, riding hard, and his face, without a hat, was silvery white.

I saw Ramon cross himself and heard him say—

"Go with God, little brother." And then he drew—the quick draw I had taught him—and fired, and Santiago whirled out of the saddle and the horse went pounding on.

He said—

"I have done well, I think."

And I said—

"You are my friend whatever you have done."

I was the one who went out to make sure. I took the pass out of his pocket, too. The story was that he was killed trying to escape.

When I came back Ramon had his head down against his saddle, and he wasn't old or hard or cold any more, but just a broken-hearted kid. My kid.

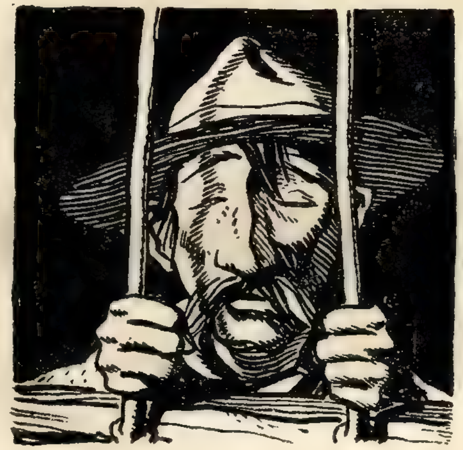
Well, that's all, I guess. It killed Don Manuel, but I think it was better that way than if the boy had cracked up in front of a firing squad. Donna Isabella went into the Convent of The Sacred Heart, and Ramon is Don Ramon da Itorbede, President of Quetzalpan now. They call him the Butcher up in Venezuela and tell the story different up there, I've heard.

I was told that Pedro Morales's son is up there now looking for backing to come home and start a revolution. Did you happen to hear anything about it, sir?

Letters of a wandering partner

Bug Eye Neerly Starves

By ALAN LeMAY



Hen Crick,
May 1877

DEER Bug Eye,

I take pensil an peece paper in hand to tell you I am well an happy, hope you are the same. I spose by this time you are wonderin wy I am not back yet an worrin fer feer sumthin has overtook me. Wen I left Elk Mowntin we figgered I coud be back with the grub in 2 weeks. Well Bug Eye I have jest figgered out I have ben gone 4 weeks. So I spose you must be sayin is he all rite an ware is he at anyway.

Bug Eye I have had a teribil time. Sumtimes I wish I had stayed back eest in Indianna an never cum trapin at all. An if I had to cum trapin I wisht I had stayed out of the Blak Hills this is a teribil country an Hen Crick is the worst plase in it.

Well Bug Eye I will tell you the troothful fack without holdin out on you an I bet you will say I am a good pardner to cum out flat footed an tell you the trooth. The troo fack is Bug Eye I am in the Hen Crick jale an have ben heer now egsactly 2 weeks an ½.

I am not a feller to complane Bug Eye but is that any way fer Hen Crick to treet a visitor that hardly ever gets in. I will say 1 thing, in a way it is a releef to get enuff to eet. I reelize that by this time you have not had anythin to eet but meet, no flour no salt no sugar no cofee no beens fer goin on 6 weeks or sinse befor I left. An wen I think of you Bg. Eye most starvin to deth I enjoy these vittles all the mor, thinkin wat a diferent life you are leedin up on Elk Mowntin.

I have ben eetin pancakes an sirup an cofee an bake beens an beef an bacin an can tomatoes an can peeches an fry potaters an I do not noe wat all, an I noe you will feel better to noe I am getin plenty to eet. Thinkin of me eetin otter be a cumfort to you Bg. Eye an help you endoor yer awful sufrin with nuthin but shot meet on Elk Mowntin. I hope yor powder do not give out BG. Eye keep a stiff uper lip.

I noe you will be astoundid to heer I am in jale an will say how cum they to jale a fine sitizin like Hank.

Well Bg. Eye after I rid our 3 horses to Hen Crick I selt our bever pelts fer $140 dolars, isunt that pritty good. Then I eet a meel an went to a sloon an had a dram or 2, then I eet anuther meel an had a few drinks more, an then I eet 1 or 2 mor meels an went in anuther sloon. That is 1 thing a like about Hen Crick, ther is always plenty sloons to chooz frum.

Jest as I was orderin anuther dram a littel short feller cum up. It is a funny thing Bug Eye ther is nobudy but littel short fellers heer in Hen Crick, 6 foot an under, no meedjum sized fellers like you an me. The littel short feller sed good mornin an I sed I am glad you like it I think it is very sloperly, that is 1 thing I notise about Hen Crick it always has rummy wether. So the littel short feller says Oho you do not like our wether at Hen Crick an I sed you understanded me correctly.

Well Bg. Eye he begun to get funny an says you are a big hik if you do not like Hen Crick an I says ware do you see a hen an he says ther ain't no hen an I says that jest goes to show.

So he says fer 2 pins I woud throw you out. Wat woud a feller want with 2 pins Bug Eye. But another littel short feller says I will furnish the 2 pins an will help you to boot. Cum on lets throw the big moose out.

Well they begun grabbin my arms an legs, is that any way to do Bg. Eye, an when I had dranken my dram I thrun about 6 of them out of there. So I spose the feller did not get his 2 pins.

Well Bug Eye 1 of them yells help the big Moos is killin us so the bartender pulls out a shot gun an I took that away frum him befour he got hurt.

3 or 4 of the fellers I had to throw out begun shootin into the sloon frum across the street. Well Bug Eye you know I can wipe a mans nose with a shot gun at 4ty paces, I gess you remember when I bet I coud shoot the pipe out of your mouth an blowed your whiskers off, but you know I was only jokin an can shoot bettern that wen I try. So I let bam jest to warn them but the old scattergun was full of nails an peeces of this an peeces of that an coud not shoot fer sower appels, so I axidentally hit 5 or 6 fellers that was standin over there an the mane body of the shot went right on throo the sloon across the street and blowed a hole in the back end. I never see the like it was reel comickle Bg. Eye.

Pritty soon a feller with a potater nose somethin like you Bug Eye he come in an sed I am the marshall you have pritty neer knocked down severil bildins an shot 7 or 8 fellers this mornin. He says you will hav to stop that I will not hav it I do not care whoo you are.

Well he was a littel short feller Bug Eye so I sed Hen Crick has got to qwit pickin on me or I will nock down the whole show an he says I gess I will hav to teech you a lesson, cum with me. I says wat for. An he says jest as a favor.

So I went along with him Bug Eye an we cum to a littel log shack an the windows was all caged up, an I says this looks like the jale, an he says I noe you are not the feller to be fooled by looks, jest step this way. So I went in ahed of him an he slamed the door an loct it.

Then he says I bet you can not throw that shot gun throo the window morn 4ty feet an I says is that wat you brot me heer for an he says yes I wanted to see how far a man coud throw a shot gun throo a window. So I thrun the shot gun morn 50ty feet an he sed gosh I dident think it coud be done. An about 100 fellers that had follered us along all laffed an wooped an hollered, I woud not have left them laff at me that way if I had ben him.

Then I sed all rite let me out, an he says I will think it over an let you noe in the mornin. An with that he left me, but he brot me dinner that nite an it was plenty so I did not worry much.

Next Day Potater Nose cums round with brekfast an I eet it an he says how do you like jale. Well wen I herd it was jale I was mad Bg. Eye, an I sed if I have ben put in jale I will wip the entire town, and he sed then I will not let you out until you promise to be good an go away we do not like fellers whoo go to work an throw 6 full size men around an shoot 7 or 8 fellers an nock bildins down. An I says I will go away but 1st I will wip the entire town. So he says you will get kilt I can not let you out. An he went away to think over wat I had sed.

Well wen Potater Nose brot dinner he sed how are the other 3 fellers in there an I sed I hav not seen any other 3 fellers. O gosh he says I forgot I let them out you have ben eetin fer 4 fellers. Frum now on I will not feed you so much I am afrade you will grow on me. Then I sed if you feed me any less I will tare the bildin down. He sed you are a teribil feller I woud not dout you woud do it, will you promis to not tare it down if I giv you enuf to eet, an I sed yes.

So Potater Nose he sed all rite then an wen you promise to go away without getin yerself kilt I will let you out. I sed I will not leeve Hen Crick until I have wipped the entire town. He sed all rite stay ther then, remember you hav promised not to hurt the jale.

So heer I set Bug Eye I can not even stand up good, the jale roof is only about 6 and ½ foot off the floor, every time I stand up I hit my nob a good old thumper agenst the roof.

Well Bg. Eye yesteday a littel short feller with a face sumpin like a horse cum along an says how is the Elk Mowntin teror an I says whoo an he says you an I says pritty good, I am goin to wip the entire town. An he says how about yore pore pardner 300 mile away.

Now I ask you Bg. Eye how did he noe about you. Well I spose I let drop that you was watin for me on Elk Mowntin wen I was in 1 of those sloons, but how did he noe you was a pore pardner. Well Bug Eye that was the 1st time I had thot of you fer severil days, aint that comickle now Bg. Eye.

So I sed I woud send Bug Eye sum grub if I new anybody to take it to him, an Horse Face says I am ridin up that way in a day or 2, if you will giv me the money I will take him a horse an sum grub. So I sed wat is ½ of $140 dolars, an he sed it is $80 dolars. So I sed if you will cum around tomorrer I will hav a letter rote, you bring me peece paper an pensil, an I will giv you the $80 dolars for my pardner an will be much obliged if you will take it off my hands. He sed I will be glad to releeve you of it.

So Bg. Eye I have ben up pritty neer all nite ritin this letter to you about how it is. Wen Horse Face cums I will giv him this letter an tell him wat kind of grub to buy for you an wat kind of horse, an I asoom you will receeve grub an horse in about a week. Wen you get the horse pleese cum down an get me out of this jale, we will wip the entire town. I woud tare down the jale but I promised Potater Nose the marshall that I woud not do that so long as I was fed.

Yr. obeedint servant,
Hank.

P S I spose you wonder Bug Eye why I am havin Horse Face buy you a horse insted of sendin 1 that we had. Well Bg. Eye wen I askt Potater Nose the marshal about that he sed he had to sell our 3 horses to pay fer the food I et. Well Bug Eye such is life. But probly the botten horse will do jest as good.

Yr. obeedint servant,
—Hank.

Hen Crick Jale,
Deer Bug Eye, Toosday, 1877

Bug Eye a teribel thing has hapened to you, I hate to tell it. Plees try to take it filsofical an not go into 1 of yer mad spells like a crazy man, you noe a mad spell only givs you indijeschin, it is not good for you Bg. Eye an gets you nothin.

Well Bug Eye littel did I spose wen I rote that other letter that it woud never reech you. A few days ago I give Horse Face $80 dolars your share of the bever pelt money to buy you a horse an sum grub, he sed he was goin to Elk Mowntin an woud take them. So for 2 days I have congratlated myself that I fixed you up fine, an cum wat may my pardner was taken care of on Elk Mowntin. I noe you will say Hank is a good pardner he done the best he coud. At leest that is wat I hope you will say, I noe you will if you are a reesonable man.

Well Bug Eye, so far so good, but today they brang Horse Face back into town an throwed him into jale with me, he is sitin there watchin me now. Wen they opened the door to throw Horse Face in I woud have rosh out an wipped the entire town, but I was so astoundit to see Horse Face agin that the idee did not cum to me until it was too late. This is a strange world, Bug Eye.

Well I asked Potater Nose wat he thout he was trine to do, perventin Horse Face frum takin grub to my pardner on Elk Mowntin, an Potater Nose the marshal sed he was takin things all right, in fack he was takin everythin that was not nailed down, includin severil $1000 dolars he stole out of the Hoop Pole sloon. But he was not takin anythin to no pardner on Elk Mowntin, he was goin the other way.

I sed is that so Horse Face, an he sed the marshall is lyin, he is only trine to confuse the ishoo, whatever that meens Bug Eye. I turn around to ask Potater Nose wy he was lyin but he was gone.

Then I sed, well wat has becum of the $80 dolars Horse Face. An he sed wy in the 1st plase I spent $10 dolars for a horse for your pardner. An wen the marshall an his hoodlums begun interferin with my bizness the horse got scart an run away. Do not blame me, blame the marshall he sed, I tride to tell the horse ther was not any danger but he woud not lissen.

All rite I sed, that accounts for $10 dolars ware is the rest. An he sed I spent the rest for grub for your pardner, it took all the money, I bot only the best. An I sed you done rite to buy only the best, nothin is too good for my pardner. Ware is the grub Horse Face I sed.

Well sed Horse Face the grub was on the horse, an of corse I do not noe how far it went. But I will bet you it went jest as far as the horse did, always pervidin it did not fall off.

Well Bug Eye that is the sum an total of it, an you see ware your money went. All that is left is the letter I rote, I made Horse Face give me that back, an wen I get a chance I will send it along with this 1, so you will see how it all cum about. Do not feel too bad about your awful los, Bg. Eye, jest remember this is a strange world, an such is life.

I would gladly send you another horse an sum grub Bug Eye an pay for it out of my own pockit, but Potater Nose the marshall has begun makin me pay for my own grub, is that any way to treet a man in jale Bug Eye, an I dout if I will hav enuf money for my own use even. Grub cums awful high in Hen Crick Bug Eye.

All is hopeless Bug Eye I do not noe how I will get this to you or how it will all cum out, but if you get this do not ferget your pore pardner in the Hen Crick jale, if you will get me out of heer we will wip the entire town.

Potater Nose askt me did I still meen to wip the entire town an I sed I sernly do, I am a man of my word. He sed I will never let you out on that bassis. So I gess I am heer fer life, aint it teribil Bg. Eye. Yr. Obeedint servant,

Henry.

Hen Crick Jale,
about the middle the
follerin week.

Deer Bug Eye,

I take pensil an peese paper in hand to tell you that things has gone frum bad to worse Bug Eye an I offen say to myself how will it all end. Sometimes I wish I had never see the Black Hills at all.

Yesteday a bunch of hoodlums frum the Hoop Pole Sloon took a noshun to hang pore Horse Face an bleeve it or not Bug Eye that is jest what they done. That is carrin a thing too far bg. Eye an if they try any of ther foolishness with me they will be sory.

1st thing yestedy mornin Potater Nose cum along chooin tobacker an about a hunderd hoodlums cum with him until they was all round the jale an a feller coud not sleep for the rackit they made, worsen wile pidgins, it made a feller wish he had his shot gun back.

I yelled Potater Nose if it aint goin to be any qwiter than this I will tare down the jale an wip the entire town. He sed you promised you woud not do that as long as you was fed, I do not want you kilt if I can help it, an I sed well I have not ben fed yet this mornin. An he sed I did not have time to cook nothin, but heer is a sholder of beef it will have to do, now keep qwite, I have other worys now. Is that any way to do Bg. Eye, giv a feller a raw sholder of beef. Well Bug Eye, a man has got to eet, I done away with it best I coud.

Look heer Stewert sed Potater Nose to Horse Face, Stewert is the rite name for Horse Face Bug Eye, an Horse Face sed go to ——.

Stewert Potater Nose sed, you will hav to tell us wat you done with them severil $1000 dolars, or else I can not save your life much longer. Marshall sed Horse Face I have not got any severil $1000 dolars I hav not got even $1 dolar, an anyway the Hoop Pole sloon fellers owed me the money, they beet me out of everythin I had, an furthermore marshall I woud not giv you nothin even if I had it wich I ain't.

Well Bug Eye it was comickle to see the marshalls face. He sed Stewert I try to be a good marshall an I keep the law frum actin jest as long as I can, but now the town is uppin arms, an even tho I am marshall I will soon have to let the law take its corse.

Horse Face sed wat do you meen, an Potater Nose sed I meen the boys are goin to stretch your neck for you if you do not coff up, they probly will anyway, that is the law we made up. So Horse Face sed you better take a flyin leep in Hen Crick, you will never get 1 sent offen me.

Wen all the hoodlums frum the sloons herd that they begun hollerin an woopin, an they got a lot of rope, an they drug Horse Face rite out of the jale. Bug Eye you shoud of herd Horse Face holler. But he did not tell them nothin an they swung him. They woud of anyway I bet Bug Eye if only for a joke, that is Hen Crick for you. Wat a town, Bg. Eye.

Well Bug Eye I see now ware I should of rosh out of the jale an wipped the entire town wen they opened the door to get Horse Face out. But I was so astoundit, an so many fellers was all woopin an hollerin an 1 thing an another til a man coud not think hardly, an the idee never cum to me until it was to late. It is a strange world Bug Eye.

Well Bug Eye I am sernly tird settin in a plase made for littel short fellers, an my money is almost gone, an I do not noe how I will get anythin to eet. An I do not noe how I will get this letter to you. I got so much ritin saved up for you now that it looks like a bale of beever pelts, an I noe you are worrin an sayin ware is the feller anyway is he all rite or wat.

But if you do get this Bug Eye you walk that 300 miles like you never walked befour an get me out of heer. I will probly be starvin by that time, hurry Bug Eye hurry.

Yr. Obeedint servant,
Hank.

Hidin in the willers upstreem
frum Hen Crick,
Erly summer 1877.

Deer Bug Eye,

Halyloogy Bug Eye I am a free man. I bet you will woop fer joy wen you heer I am a free man an have wipped the entire town.

Not only that Bug Eye but we are rich men an will want for nothin an I am sendin you sum grub, I bet you will be glad. You shoud be a happy man Bg. Eye.

You noe I promised Potater Nose the marshall that I woud not tare down the jale as long as I got fed plenty, but I got so stiff settin ther I begin to wish the money woud run out so he woud qwit feedin me an I coud tare down the jale an get out. I am a man of my word Bug Eye but ther is no harm in wishin.

Well sir Bug Eye that money never did run out. Jest wen it was pritty neer all gone sumpin hapened.

Sumbody has found sum mor gold I gess Bug Eye, the town begun fillin up until ther was nothin but noise all the time, a feller coud not sleep, an fellers was rushin into town an rushin out an ther was always a crowd in the street an in the sloons an all you coud heer was talk about gold.

Well Bug Eye ever few hours a lot of fellers woud go hurrin out of Hen Crick to look fer gold, an I gess maybe Potater Nose went with sum of them, anyway he did not show up. Well Bug Eye wen he did not cum all day with nothin to eet I sed Potater Nose is carrin this too far, All rite for him I will not stand for it.

Well Bug Eye I thout I woud batter that door down with my hed, an I giv it 2 or 3 hard licks an it coud not have stood much mor but sudnly I thout this is a foolish way to do I am wastin time I will take off the roof insted.

So I give that roof a push an she cum loose easy, it was nothin but a few logs Bug Eye with planks on top an a few bolders on to keep it frum blowin off I gess, an it cum loose 1st push.

Well they was a littel space between the walls an the roof, an Bug Eye you shoud of seen the rubbish that fell out when the roof come loose. Ther was rats nests an ol newspapers an 1 dozen tin spoons an the last will an testament of a feller named Wlm. Moffat, an a brokin comb wich I brung along, an all sorts valybil things like that, I do not noe wat all.

But best of all Bug Eye bleeve it or not they was a lot of money, how much I do not noe, I have counted it severil times but I always lose track an cum out diferent, but anyways Bug Eye it is severil $1000 dolars.

I set an sorted over that stuff for upwards of 1 hour an ½ I pritty neer fergot wat I set out to do. But finly it got dark an I coud not see no mor, an ther was nothin left to do but clime out an wip the entire town like I sed I woud. I am a man of my word Bug Eye I did not like to leeve without doin that.

Well I went in a log store Bug Eye an I had a good meel, an nobody sed nothin, I gess they did not want to get me started, anyway they jest acted like they never new me at all. An I eet 2 or 3 meels includin beef stakes an unyuns an fry taters an beans an can peeches an bred an sirrup an I do not noe wat all Bug Eye.

Then I went in a sloon, an I cracked my nob on the top of the door as I went in an that made me mad, an I sed in a loud voice I am now goin to wip the town.

With that Bug Eye I grobe 2 fellers an nocked ther heds together an thrun them at 3 mor, an sum fellers begin shootin an hit 2 or 3 other fellers by mistake, an I see they was not elboe room in that sloon so I thrun everbody out of the sloon by 1s an 2s includin the bartender an the gambler, an then I went outside to wip the entire town.

Well Bug Eye heer they cum out of all the sloons an it was comickle to see ther faces. I begun layin rite an left an you shoud of see them pile up in stacks as I spun round an hit them over, 2 an 3 at a crack Bug Eye, bleeve it or not.

That coudent go on frever Bug Eye, the town begun to get cleered up and I see they would soon be able to begin shootin without hittin eech other like they ben doin, so I went in the sloon ware the bartender with the shot gun was, an shore nuff he upped with the gun an I got it. An wen I cum out wavin that gun you shoud of see them scatter.

I walked out of town an up the crick, an jest as I got on the edge of town heer cum a big mob shootin an woopin fit to die, so I let blam with that gun, not aimin to hit anybody but the ol bloomp of a gun scattered every wich way an hit 8 or 9 fellers I gess an blowed a hole in the side of a sloon, an the mob scutter.

So I see then that I had wipped the entire town, so I walked off peecabel. But the gun aint loaded any mor, so I lay low.

So heer I am hidin in the willers up the crick a rich man. An pritty soon I will send a feller with your grub. Persunly I think I will go lookin for this gold plase up in the hills heer.

Watever you do stay ware you are as I want to divvy up our money, an if you do not stay ther we will get sepparated an you will go throo life a pennyless man, thinkin about your pardner hoo is rich an happy an wipped the entire town of Hen Crick.

Yr. obeedint Servant,
Hank.

p s I hav run into Onest John Pilson you noe old Onest John, he is comin to Elk Mowntin an he will bring you all theese letters an sum grub. Do not get resless, stay ware you are, if you do not stay ther it will be a fatil mistake. Be pashent Bug Eye. It is a strange world.—Hank.

Of the advance of Islam and

When the

By WILLIAM ASHLEY ANDERSON

AT THAT time anything was possible in northeast Africa. There were more conspiracies set afoot in Addis-Abeba, the village capital of Abyssinia, than Constantinople ever knew. There were more adventurers with desperate thoughts fixed on that unconquered empire than the meter-gauge railroad that runs from Djibouti across French Somaliland into the desert-girt highlands could possibly accommodate.

If Abyssinia ever becomes Mohammedan it will be the undoing of Africa. It has belligerently maintained itself as a Christian country from days when Roman legions were losing themselves in German forests. And there is every reason to believe that it will continue so to maintain itself for many centuries to come. But at that time a crash was imminent.

This was the situation: Daily the world expected to hear that Verdun had fallen; Gallipoli had proved a failure; and Mesopotamia was a terrible mess. The Germans still held on exasperatingly in East Africa, and the Soudan was simmering.

Now Abyssinia is capable of raising an army of over half a million armed men; and competent military observers, bearing in mind the disastrous battle of Adowa when the Italian army was smothered under rifle fire, have rated the Abyssinian marksman above the Boer. Imagine, then, the consequences if Abyssinia had been inflamed with the conquering lust of Islam!

All the great European powers very anxiously keep legations at Addis-Abeba. At that time they were working frenziedly, some to hold the equilibrium, others to upset the works completely in one grand cataclysmic crash.

The tools employed to precipitate this crash were women—the most beautiful procurable in North Africa. Some served with pride, some with pleasure and some with a sense of a high and noble purpose behind it all. They were most seductive, passionate daughters of the tents; soft, voluptuous beauties from the olive-crowned hills of the Levant.

Lidj Yassou, the prince, was a weak, good looking youth, and him they lured with sweet kisses from the strong principles of his ancestors. They encircled him with the unbreakable bonds of women's arms, and prepared to tumble him in drunken languor upon the ruins of his ancient empire.

a brave woman of the Levant

Silence Spoke

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

There came a day when, flattered and light-headed, he rode with Mohammedans into Somaliland, fraternizing with the traditional enemies of his country, thrilling at the prospect of a world conquest. He donned a turban and entered a mosque to pray—

IN ADEN you could sense the trend of affairs by the insolent demeanor of the Somalis and by a sort of repressed jubilation on the part of the Arabs. Colonel Lawrence made it his particular job to take care of the latter—a magnificent story in itself—but one that has been often told.

But there are other tales of similar agents of the Allied Powers, who worked in darkness, but with the most amazing brilliance and courage, to keep the back doors of Africa shut against an unlooked for and overwhelming eruption of barbarians. A hundred Kitcheners could not have stopped a second Mahdi if once launched with flame and slaughter upon an all-conquering career.

It is an extraordinary characteristic of that time that the most dramatic episodes were often smitten with the buffoon's bladder, the most terrible tragedy averted with a laugh.

Another interesting element was the tremendous power, for good or for evil, that was exercised by women. It seemed almost as if there had been a recrudescence of the powerful women of Mohammet's day—of Ayesha, of Fatima.

My insight into what was going on came chiefly through Cohusac. And there you have an extraordinary chap.

Cohusac had been buried in the mud by a bursting shell near Soissons, and thirty seconds later was blown out again. A Fokker winged him half a mile above the forest of Campigny; and yet he lived. Subsequently, at Aden, wracked in body and dejected in mind, he ran into an old friend, Nobby Hickson, another of those obscure colonels whose job was to control in orderly fashion a hot desert full of devils, with only a few hundred camel-men to back him up.

Nobby had dinner with me one night in Aden. It was a clandestine affair, but Cohusac managed to hobble in. Before the sun came leaping out of the Hadramaut, filling the smoldering town with purple light, a miracle had been effected.

Except that he was thin, slightly hunched from the imagined weakness of hypochondria, the Frenchman was himself again—as fervid, fascinating and daring a young rascal as you will ever have the chance of meeting. Nobby had effected this by introducing a new woman into Cohusac's life.

Nobby had never seen this woman, nor had Cohusac. It was only known that she was concerned in a conspiracy to stir up the Somalis in cooperation with the apostate prince of Abyssinia. But from all evidence she was an amazing creature.

I heard the whole tale years later. The most amusing episode happened when Cohusac landed in Somaliland, after disposing of Abu Khalil, an arrogant merchant prince whose politics and passions were not so good as his business acumen and who had placed himself at the head of a group of conspirators whose object was Arabian cooperation with newly converted Mohammedan Abyssinia.

This amazing Cohusac actually managed to rid himself of the conspirators within sight of the Somali shore, under the guns of a British cruiser, having insinuated himself among the Mohammedans as an Arab hunchback troubadour, a former student at Beyrout.

Forget the drama for a moment and listen to what he did to El Fetnah, the woman.

THE setting sun which still painted the Gulf of Aden a purple glow sent long shadows along the trembling sand of the African shore. A golden veil was drawn across the sky, darkening swiftly. The sudden calmness that hangs at this moment over the earth, seemed here to have attained its most perfect setting—a vast illimitable sea, faintly heaving; a low flat shore that appeared in the gathering darkness to stretch away into an endless desert; a sky that curved above in an unbroken dome.

Unfortunately the harmonious grandeur of the scene was considerably marred by the frantic human activity in Cohusac's immediate vicinity.

He had sent Abu Khalil overboard with a well directed blow of his staff on the back of the neck. The dhow had luffed up into the wind, and since he knew nothing of the art of bringing a lateen-rigged boat about unaided, he flung himself with Arab oaths upon the heavy sweep and began splashing frantically.

The air behind was agitated by the frenzied curses of the late members of the crew and cargo who had jettisoned themselves on the shallow bar on the mistaken assumption that they might easily flounder ashore, and found too late they were trapped in deep water. From a couple of miles offshore a blue-silhouetted cruiser casually lobbed shells between the bar and the shore; and much farther in, a little cutter in command of an ensign ruffled the smooth sea as it bore trippingly down upon the infuriated conspirators.

At this point Cohusac felt a delightful tingling all over his body. His recent adventures had revived his health and strength remarkably. He was very fit, very joyful. Only one thing filled him with uneasiness.

The woman, El Fetnah, was standing against the thwart amidships where she had recoiled from Abu Khalil's sardonic embrace. Her graceful hands were at her throat, working nervously; her distended eyes were looking astern with an expression of horror. She was stunned. It occurred to Cohusac that though the situation was fair enough for him, it was tragedy for her.

"Fortunately," thought he, fingering the black scraggly growth on his chin and his gaunt cheeks, "I am still nothing but an inconsiderable troubadour to this lady."

As the dhow slid forward he saw that the shore curved inward with a long sweep to the north. With darkness falling like a blanket and the rapidly fading cutter making a shield against the cruiser's guns, he knew that he could escape.

"But I might," thought he, "go aboard the cruiser, and claim considerable *kudos* for my share in this affair!

After all, this *bibi* is nothing more nor less than a dangerous conspirator, an enemy."

El Fetnah looked at him without a word, her breast rising and falling under her *chamma* with her strangled breathing.

Cohusac's heart began to pump heavily. Picking up his mandolin with affected nonchalance, he began to strum, singing in English:

> "The owl and the pussy-cat went to sea
> "In a be-e-e-au-tiful pea-green boat!"

El Fetnah said in a sweet voice husky with emotion—

"Allah has given me a brother in you, Hussein!"

"Prisoner is paroled in my custody!" murmured Cohusac with a sigh.

"You did wisely to strike that licentious dog," she continued, drawing closer, and looking past him at the dim figure of Abu Khalil wailing and splashing astern.

"Wisdom is God's," said Cohusac. "Zut!" he added to himself. "What on earth am I to do with her?"

Soon the sudden darkness made it impossible to distinguish anything in the water. Only faint sounds continued to reach them.

"*Wallah!*" said Fetnah with sudden fury. "I wash my hands of the uncleanness! We will proceed without him. I spit in his face! We will go straight into Abyssinia—to the Prince!"

"*Hudha!*" said Cohusac. "Over there is the desolate desert of Fah and out there is the open sea, with the Frangi's warships looking for us. Unless you are specially blessed—"

"He is a weakling," said El Fetnah.

"By Allah," retorted Cohusac, "I have power to put you in the prison of the Frangi! Have you considered that? I am a victim. The British government will reward me if I put this dhow about and shriek a shriek or two. In the name of Allah, have you thought of that?"

"Yes," said Fetnah, "I have thought of that."

Cohusac had taken a position cross-legged on the narrow poop. The woman was standing with her elbows on a level with his knees, her compelling face turned upward. His elevation gave Cohusac a sense of power. The even rush of the dhow through the faintly luminous water, the brilliant glimmer of the stars above, the distant murmur from which they were slipping away in mysterious silence filled him with strength.

All at once Fetnah placed her hand with a strong grip on Cohusac's thin ankle. A narrow edge of steel glinted not more than an inch away from his stomach.

"Keep your posterity clear of such a thing!" gasped Cohusac. "By Allah, am I not your brother? Have I ever done anything that was not out of purest friendship? I ask Allah to witness—"

The tip of the slim *jambeer* touched Cohusac's *footah.*

"By ——," thought he with nausea, "now is the time to kick, or I'm a dead one!"

"Hussein, there is one thing about you," said El Fetnah, suddenly lowering the knife, "that elevates you. You have some regard for a woman's intelligence."

"Surpassing!" cried the Frenchman, feeling a stream of perspiration trickle down his neck.

"I have looked with kindness on you, Hussein, because of your affliction—May Allah pity all!—and I have asked you to look upon me as if you were in fact a brother. You are a person of intelligence and I do not believe that at heart you are cowardly. I thank you for the blow on Abu Khalil's neck. By Allah, it was a blow well struck!"

"I am your brother," repeated Cohusac, moistening his lips nervously.

El Fetnah's eyes remained fastened upon him.

"Hussein!"

"Command is obedience."

"I, a woman and daughter of woman, have made the pilgrimage to Mecca even as the most worthy *hadji* of them all, and I have spoken face to face with my lord, the caliph. I have also been to Istanbul and stood in the presence of the sultan himself—may Allah preserve him and his house! Theologians say that man is the lord of mankind and woman is his slave. Those are words of fools!"

"You speak like a most well read *talib,*" murmured Cohusac with a note of admiration.

"A *talib!*" said El Fetnah, with a contemptuous glance. "I have confounded the best of them! I have confounded them, speaking in various tongues. By Allah, I have shown them that Islam needs not a man but a woman to lead, where brains are of more importance than guns! *Wa haita!* You have seen yourself the arrogance of that emotional fool, Abu Khalil. His place is in the kitchen—or the *harimlik!* Because of his idiocy—May all such false followers of Islam utterly perish!—we have lost some brave sheiks. The cause is actually imperiled!"

"Pardon me," said Cohusac humbly, "but of what cause do you speak?"

"Of the cause of Islam," said El Fetnah sternly, with an expression of countenance that made her look like Medea. "*Deen Mohammed!*"

Cohusac shivered.

"Allah is all!" he murmured.

Probably feeling that the success of her future movements depended somewhat upon the intelligence and fidelity of the harmless troubadour, El Fetnah leaned towards him, explaining her plans without hesitation.

"Behold, I *have* been a *talib,* but not such as you see in small villages. I have journeyed far, not neglecting to examine into the learning of the Frangi. I have been even as far as Lundra, and there I have seen the council that rules the British empire—red- and white-faced men with black silk hats on their heads, talking quarrelsomely in a large dark room. Believe me, they are fools, with no dignity. And I have seen the last of the Cæsars, a sheik truly, with white whiskers growing under his ears like bunches of grapes. But he *has* dignity, and armies of warriors, well trained and brave, like the warriors of his cousin, the sultan of the Germans."

With a queer feeling of topsy-turviness, Cohusac gasped—

"You have been to Lundra?"

"A miserable city," said El Fetnah reflectively, "without sunlight, without color, damp, gray, always wrapped in rain and smoke. In truth, by Allah! It seemed like a city of *afrits*—a city with a voice like the ocean, roaring incessantly—a thing to be hated!"

Cohusac rolled his eyes. At one time he might have met this woman in London, in Paris, in Vienna! He might have dined and danced with her, flirted with her, fascinated by her beauty, accepting her as a fashionable lady of his own world. And, behold! Side by side in a gently careening dhow, rising and falling on the edge of a whispering African surf, here they were sailing together into one of the darkest adventures the Dark Continent had promised since the Mahdi blotted out the Sudan.

"And to her," thought Cohusac amazedly, "I am little more than a *fellahin* who has traveled no farther than Beyrout, while she is a flame of Islam! She flatters my acting!" Prompted by this thought, he said aloud in a tone of shocked reproach, "O sister of grace, O Fetnah, I have heard scandalous stories of those infidel cities. Did you not fear contamination from the loose morals of Christian women?"

"Muchly exaggerated, Hussein! Moreover, had I not the strength of Allah to sustain me? Believe me, my thoughts were not upon lusts or lustful women! My thoughts were always on the glory of Islam. When I looked up at the dome of their great mosque in Lundra I thought of St. Sophia in Istanbul, and I prayed to Allah that some day this too would be a mosque for the faithful wrested from the hands of the infidel."

"By Allah, a worthy woman! A revelation! I have never heard such words from a female."

"Yet," said Fetnah magnificently, "there have been females who talked so. Did you ever hear of Semiramis, queen of the Persians, who at one time conquered the world? The Muscovites had a queen as great. And the English had one even greater!"

"Ha!" exclaimed Cohusac triumphantly. "Her face is upon the rupee. Truly that is greatness!"

Fetnah laughed. Leaning on the gunwhale, she gazed moodily towards the wall of darkness that seemed to rise in the night above the shore.

"All greatness is in Allah," said she.

"We go, you and I, to Abyssinia. There we will find thousands of armed warriors waiting. All this has been arranged by sheiks, working in secret. The prince has already gone to Harrar near the borders of Somaliland. The Somalis will rise, so will the Dankalis. So will the Tigreans of the north—famous fighters and wise men! We will suffocate the Christians of Shoa—we will suffocate them in a tight-drawn sack! Then—Allah is greatest—Egypt will once more be ours! Tunis, Tripoli, Algiers — all Africa! All western Asia! No infidel power can stand against us, once we conquer the stumbling-block of Abyssinia."

"Allah! Allah! Allah!" repeated Cohusac rubbing his thin beard.

"And if I redeem the empire of the caliphs," said Fetnah, "will I not thereby redeem the womanhood of Islam? The Prophet knew that Paradise is not complete without its houris. In the name of Allah the Just, the Compassionate, will I not prove that Islam can not rise without the strength and help of woman? They will not deny the existence of a soul in this woman's body. By Allah, I will prove it!"

"Zut!" said Cohusac to himself. "So that is the inspiration of her frenzy."

As if her own words had aroused in her a passionate energy almost beyond her power to control, Fetnah lapsed again into a gloomy silence. Cohusac could hear her breathing, her lungs straining, the breath hissing between her teeth.

He began to feel profoundly disturbed. His heart was drawn irresistibly toward her. This sentiment was idealized by a positive conviction of her idealism. Nevertheless the Frenchman did not forget that she was an implacable enemy. He knew that no softness would betray him; but he began to feel too that, for his part, he could not betray Fetnah to a French or British court martial. He felt sick at the thought of court martial, for neither would hesitate at her execution! There remained only one course—to follow her doggedly, continuing his dubious rôle of spy.

"O my sister," he said, touching his forehead, lips and heart, "trust me! By Allah, may my tongue be torn from my head, may the arms wither on my shoulders if I betray you to your loss! Allah is my witness. I live to protect you."

"I thank Allah for this," said Fetnah.

"First, then," said Cohusac briskly, "we will continue on to Djibouti in French Somaliland whence the railroad runs to Abyssinia. There we will dispose of the boat, and with the money obtained make our way inland to whatever destination you name."

"*Taib!*" said Fetnah. After a moment, she reached forward and, taking Cohusac's free hand, pressed a leather bag into it. "Take this, out of Allah's bounty! I have more. It may be necessary for you to have funds in your own hand. These Frangi have the eyes of devils, and we must be watchful."

At this instant the necessity for this last admonition was strikingly emphasized.

With a gradual, almost imperceptible slowing up, as if the wind had suddenly fallen flat, the dhow came to a gentle but positive stop. Dead silence. Then the straining sail tore loose and began to flap with loud reports. A line of phosphorus ahead marked the edge of the beach.

The boat yawed and swung heavily about, but it only managed to plow more deeply into the soft sand. Cohusac jumped on the stern-piece above the rudder, but the boat was fixed solidly.

"Father of calamity!" he shouted with

a furious curse. "We are hardly out of range of the Frangi's guns, and behold—disaster!"

"How far away is the beach?" said El Fetnah.

"Can you swim?" asked Cohusac.

"The beach is flat. Perhaps it is shallow enough for wading."

"*Taib*," murmured Cohusac. He looked at her reflectively, feeling like a gamin. "At all events we must leave the boat. That Frangi warship will follow the line of the coast in deep water, and the small boat will without doubt follow closer in to shore."

"Then let us go," said El Fetnah after a moment's hesitation. "Are you not my brother? Go in, and when you have reached the beach, if you find the depth not too great, I'll follow. Withdraw a bit. I'll call when I reach the sand."

Cohusac made up a package, and with his *kanza* bundled about his shoulders, slipped overboard, while Fetnah, lifting her *chamma*, averted her face.

Whatever frivolous thoughts may have been in Cohusac's head as he went into the water vanished before he had progressed more than ten steps. Instead of being cold the water was actually tepid, but Cohusac at every forward, groping with his distended toes in the dark, anticipated the electric shock of one of the terrible barbs of a sting-ray. Then he thought of barracuda, finny leopards with teeth like lancets, and sand sharks that attack like wolves, worrying their prey to pieces with small, tearing bites. Besides, the sands were alive with armored crabs and there was always the possibility of stepping into quicksand, or into the nest of an octopus.

Cohusac reached the shore, staggering forward in a panic. The warm water, his violent exertions, his own terrifying imagination brought the sweat pouring down his lean body. His trembling legs collapsed under him and he sat huddled with his head between his knees, breathing spasmodically. When his fright passed, he rose, slipped on his *footah*, his *kansa* and the jacket over it, rewound his turban, put his feet in his dilapidated European shoes, twisted the girdle about his waist and, thrusting his *jambeer* into it, stood upright, stretching luxuriously at the feel of solid ground under him.

He was about to shout to Fetnah when he remembered he was supposed to be a hunchback, and the perspiration beaded again on his forehead as he thought how easy it was to give himself away. Adjusting his pad, he thrust his thin neck forward and permitted his chin to rest on his chest.

"*Il n'y a pas mèche!*" said he with exasperation. "It's impossible! I can't keep this rôle for long."

The whiteness of the broad flat beach and the faint luminousness of the atmosphere that had succeeded the intense darkness immediately after sunset made it possible for Cohusac to take some note of the beach. There was no sign of habitation; no sound came from shoreward. But he made out faintly a few palm trees, and this was sufficient to indicate a place of shelter, water and the possibility of food.

Raising his voice he shouted to El Fetnah, warning her to splash water as she approached, to frighten away danger.

Then he withdrew to the shelter of the palms, where he proceeded to gather enough dried fronds to make a couch and a small fire when he considered it safe to do so. He rose to his feet and remained in that position, fascinated.

The dark misted surface of the gently heaving sea met the velvet darkness of the sky in a perfect blending, so that the dim edge of the beach created the illusion of a horizon many degrees below the horizon of the ocean. The more brilliant stars were reflected in the water, intensifying the illusion of a vaster sky. Even the dark bulk of the dhow had melted into the night; and to Cohusac it seemed as if he were peering over the edge of the world, looking into a vastness of shadowy space.

Through this space floated the head and shoulders of El Fetnah—dim, white, veiled only in wisps of white flame.

Fire clung to her body. Luminous pearls dripped from it, palpitating with life. The tossing arms scattered spectral flames about her. In this cloud El Fetnah seemed like a Venus born in the frothy crest of a wave.

"*Sacre!*" said Cohusac amazed. "That is an effect! Phosphorus splashing upon a divine form rising from the sea at night. She is a pearl!"

Sinking reluctantly upon his hands and knees, he scooped a hole in the sand and laid a tiny fire. The box of matches in his bundle had become slightly damp; the phosphorus became smeared upon his fingers until they glowed wanly. At length he struck a match and succeeded in making a small blaze.

When El Fetnah approached and looked down at him, he was stirring a mess of rice and chopped meat, sniffing appreciatively at its aroma, glancing up at her with an absent-minded frown. El Fetnah returned the look with eyes that seemed to read his heart for a second. Then with her black cloak lifted over her mouth, she looked about uneasily.

"Who were those men?" she whispered.

"Men!" exclaimed Cohusac almost toppling backward. "What men?"

"There were men by the fringe of the beach when I drew near shore."

Cohusac's face grew hot. But he knew instantly it was not him she had seen. They looked at each other in apprehensive silence. Out of the darkness on the landward side came an unmistakable sucking sound, grumbling and smothered roars.

"Camels!" cried Cohusac, jumping to his feet.

At that moment the flames leaped up from the dried palm-leaves, throwing a wide circle of light about them. The edge of this circle just touched the bare sandaled feet of a crowd of silent men. The band of shadow made it impossible for Cohusac to make out the sinister figures. He had a wild impulse to turn and rush back into the water.

El Fetnah sat down calmly on the sand, a sensible distance from the fire, and fixed her eyes indifferently on the blaze, keeping the fringe of her *chamma* well over her face.

"*Bismillah!*" said Cohusac loudly. "In the name of Allah draw near!"

"*Salaam!*" responded a bearded Somali sheik, stepping into the light.

In a second others followed, jostling, laughing, calling out arrogantly. They were a wild group. Tall, lean men with spindling legs, gleaming white teeth, and possessed of the infuriating habit of loud insolent laughter. Two promptly sat down on either side of El Fetnah, but she did not raise her eyes. Feeling that he was in for a bad time, Cohusac also sat down, folding his arms so that his hand was within easy reach of the hilt of his *jambeer.*

"How is your health?" said he to the Somali who had first answered his greeting. "Good, I trust, praise Allah. Behold, we are strangers upon this coast. We seek hospitality from you."

The night was as hot as the day had been. The evening breeze, slowly dying out had left the breath of the desert—smelling of dry grass, of camels, of aromatic wood—to blow languidly upon them. Cohusac was bathed in sweat. The pad on his shoulder itched maddeningly. His anxiety was succeeded by a sudden rising of anger.

"One of the Somalis reached forward gingerly with the blunt end of his spear and touched him on the hump. The Frenchman scrambled to his feet, true to his rôle and, jerking out his *jambeer,* began to curse furiously, his voice rising in shrieks.

"Allah!" exclaimed the Somali with a shrill note of surprize. "By the beard! All I sought was a blessing!"

Inquisitive women, with dyed hair and the melting grease of pomade dripping down on their shoulders and bosoms from which their white togas fell away, mixed with the crowd of men, exclaiming, calling querulously. Skinny, naked boys with round bellies and large amazed eyes slipped to the front where they stood first on one foot and then on the other, balancing themselves with long sticks which they carried as lances. The warriors now became more familiar, like bullying boys.

Crowding around the fire, they helped themselves to the food Cohusac had prepared; they jostled him despite his *jambeer;* they pulled at the bundle he had carried from the boat. He seized them by the togas, protesting in the name of Allah at this barbarity, but they only jerked away laughing. One of those seated by El Fetnah put his hands on her arm.

"She is more beautiful than a houri," he proclaimed. "By Allah, she is a white lamb! O my sweet one, come with me! O my sweet one, behold, my heart is cooked! Come to my tent. You are mine!"

He actually made a move to drag El Fetnah to her feet, while the rest murmured encouragement. Cohusac had been trying to keep to his rôle. But madness all at once seized him.

Flinging his frail body upon the amorous Somali, he tried to kill him with his *jambeer* and might have succeeded if El Fetnah had not seized his wrist in both her strong hands.

He was torn from the astounded lover by other tribesmen falling upon him from behind, yelling with excitement. They twisted the *jambeer* from his hand and threw him back into the circle. This violence somewhat restored Cohusac's reason. Remembering his rôle again, he cried out shrilly in a panting, desperate voice:

"Shame! Shame, you brothers of Islam! Shame! Shame on your house and your posterity! By Allah, you will be remembered for this heathenish act! Shame! There will be vengeance required for this insult!"

"Insult?" exclaimed the sheik in astonishment. "What insult is this? The young warrior offered the woman a compliment—and behold, he calls it an insult!"

Cohusac stammered:

"What! Is this not an insult to offer violence—"

"By Allah, listen!" protested the sheik. The leather collar and the amber beads about his neck indicated a leader of some kind. His arrogance was more somber. He appeared to be one who could lead equally well in hilarity or ferocity—a natural chieftain of quarrelsome tribesmen. Cohusac therefore caught himself.

"It is our custom," said the sheik, "that when a man meets a woman who suits his fancy, he may persuade her to return with him to his tent and be to him as a wife. When the first husband is told by the neighbors of this it is *his* privilege to take his place at the door of the tent where the two went in. And behold, when the lover comes out again and encounters the first husband with weapons in his hand one or the other must die. Before all the people, Allah decides who shall keep that woman."

Cohusac felt a great weakness in the pit of his stomach. His mouth became dry. His tongue stuck to his palate when he tried to make words. To think that he was incapable of defending El Fetnah, of safeguarding her from the soiled hands of these brown barbarians, stinking of grease and cattle!

Looking down shamefaced and with real anguish, he remembered that El Fetnah had known the life of London, had lunched at the Berkeley, no doubt, had supped at Ciro's in Paris. And he recalled the words—

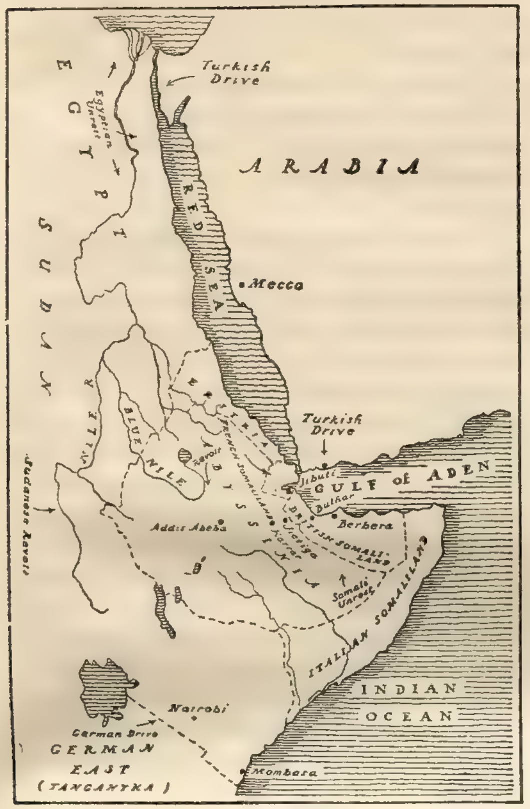
"Are you not to me a brother?"

Groaning, but inspired with one more stratagem, he fell on his hands and knees and crawled to El Fetnah's feet kissing the hem of her skirt, calling out with agitation:

"Kill me, O Emir! Kill me, first among the women of Islam! O daughter of Fatima the Holy One, I have been false to my trust! Having seen a profane hand laid with violence upon my sultana and yet not perished to avenge the indignity, I am not worthy to live! Kill me, and may Allah be my judge! Or give your Excellency's servant a *jambeer* that he may die worthily with the spears of an enemy in his heart!"

"Peace!" said El Fetnah, looking at him with a strange expression, her voice taking the tone that Arabs call *saa'ja*—low, thrilling. Raising her voice slightly and looking full at the puzzled sheik, she added contemptuously:

"What sort of conduct is this? Behold, I have come among you in the cause of Islam! I have come as an emissary of the holy Caliph himself— May Allah prosper him, and add to his years—I have come to you with the words of the Prophet. *Deen Mohammed! Deen Mohammed!*"


EGYPT
Egyptian Unrest
Turkish Drive
ARABIA
RED SEA
Mecca
SUDAN
NILE
BLUE NILE
Revolt
ERITREA
ABYSSINIA
FRENCH SOMALILAND
Turkish Drive
Jibuti
GULF of ADEN
Bulhar
Berbera
BRITISH SOMALILAND
Jigiga
Harrar
Addis Abeba
Sudanese Revolt
Somali Unrest
ITALIAN SOMALILAND
INDIAN OCEAN
Nairobi
German Drive
GERMAN EAST (TANGANYKA)
Mombasa

"*Deen Mohammed!*" murmured the Somalis automatically.

"By Allah," exclaimed the frustrated lover, "these words are nothing but air! Believe me, this hunchback and his woman are people of small account. Allah is my witness, did they not arrive on this coast in a fisherman's dhow, without escort, without dignity?"

"Give us a token," demanded the sheik.

"For a slight token," said El Fetnah with a tolerant smile, "look you in the girdle of that gabbler, that thief!"

The warrior who had been so insolent a second before gave a startled grunt, snatching at his girdle as if fire had touched him. But other hands snatched also—and found a bag of gold and jewels! A look of incredulous horror spread over his features. Catching his breath, he began to stammer wildly, waving his arms violently, shrieking denials of guilt. The sheik looked into the wallet, cursed with exasperation and, stooping forward, laid it in El Fetnah's lap.

Then he turned abruptly and made a gesture. The thief was seized, his arm held out rigidly. One of his companions drew a heavy blade and with one short stroke slashed the hand off. For a moment the Somali looked at the bleeding stump with a sort of dazed surprize. Gripping the wrist, he wandered off dazedly into the darkness, followed by curious boys.

"Such things happen," said El Fetnah calmly, "to those who attempt violence to my person!"

"Zut!" thought Cohusac rising to his haunches and glancing hesitantly at her. "She is a demon!"

Having maimed one of his best warriors, the sheik was instantly filled with an angry resentment.

"*Bibi,*" said he, "we have come to the coast to meet emissaries returning from Aden. By Allah, the description does not fit you! Where is Ghabah, sheik of the Dessa Gallas? Where is Omar Georgios the Abyssinian? And, by Allah, what has become of the Emir Abu Khalil?"

It would have been easy enough for El Fetnah to explain the scattering of the conspirators by shells from the gunboat *Vixen;* it would have been easy enough to describe how the leaders of the Somalis, Danakils and Tigreans had leaped from the dhow to swim ashore; but it would not be easy to explain how she, a weak woman, and Hussein, a frail hunchback, had managed to escape still in possession of the dhow.

The Somalis are a suspicious and impulsive people—treacherous, prone to sudden violence, and reasonable discussion would be entirely beyond their understanding. Rage at the loss of their leaders might easily incite them to instant murder. There was too much about the occurrence that implied treachery. To El Fetnah, Cohusac's part in the affair seemed perfectly plausible, but the fact that it was a blow delivered by Cohusac himself that had brought an end to Abu Khalil's ambitions silenced her.

She gave a fleeting thought to the shocking custom of these nomads in regard to women, wondering how long she could keep her ascendancy over them while crossing the desert. Better to make her way circuitously by railroad from Djibuti. There was little choice of safety, since the Ogaden Gallas would have to return through hostile country, avoiding as best they could the Somali constabulary. The essential thing was to reach the Prince of Abyssinia as soon as possible with her positive assurance of Mohammedan cooperation throughout Asia and North Africa.

"First," said El Fetnah firmly, "tell me where is his Highness, Lidj Yassou."

"He has returned to Harrar. There the tribesmen will gather to his support."

"But what about the governor of Harrar, Ras Taffari? Has he too declared for Islam?"

"Ras Taffari has not declared himself; and Maukara the Eunuch is in Harrar to support him and to advise him."

This Maukara, a merciless ascetic, was a terrible and implacable figure welded unshakably to the ancient Christianity of his forefathers. Retired, somber, sinister, he had been an abbot of his own monastery. Above all he was sincere—one of the few remaining fanatics who could answer the insults of Islam with the fury of one whose people have retained their faith through seventeen hundred years of conflict.

El Fetnah, therefore, understood the significance of Maukara's presence near the prince in Harrar.

"Does this cursed Maukara influence the prince?"

"*Wallah*, I have seen the prince myself! I have ridden before him, chanting the history of my people. And believe me, I speak the truth. The supreme influence with Lidj Yassou are the women of his *harim!*"

El Fetnah uttered an exclamation.

"Enough!" exclaimed the sheik, looking about him anxiously. "What token have you?"

"Be seated," said El Fetnah.

Very much to his own surprize the angry sheik seated himself before the woman, Cohusac making way for him, watching curiously.

"*Hudha!*" exclaimed El Fetnah softly, bending slightly forward, looking fixedly into the sheik's face with distending eyes. "In this place of danger, you, O Sheik of many people, and I, a stranger, meet. Though strangers, we are both servants of Allah; and Allah has given me power to see what is hidden from others. Behold! You are no longer unknown to me. You are Sheik Alibin Godi, father of the desert people beyond Hargeisa!"

"*Taib!*" murmured Sheik Ali, startled.

"There is nothing remarkable in my knowing that, by Allah!" said El Fetnah. "All Africa knows when the Sheik Ali bin Godi moves his family! Every herd of cattle along the frontier stampedes for shelter a month before your tents are struck."

"A curse on informers!" said the sheik uneasily.

"You doubt my knowledge?" said El Fetnah. "Behold, I can read the thoughts behind your eyes! Better than your own scouts can I tell you the whereabouts of your worst enemies! As a vulture sees, can I also see the place of danger—the racing camels, the flying horses, the women running on foot crying in vain to Allah, the soldiers in khaki, the dust, the curses, the blood! O Sheik, close your eyes for an instant and fasten your thoughts on some person, no matter how remote! Believe me, do as I say! Concentrate all your faculties on this picture in your mind. So! Is your thought fixed?"

"Yes, by Allah!" said the sheik with angry anxiety, licking his lips and sweeping the circle of intent faces with his worried glance.

"Then," said El Fetnah in an absent voice, looking still more sharply into the eyes of Ali bin Godi, as if actually watching some figure through a window, "listen! I see a man—a man on camelback. No. On horseback. Sometimes he is on a horse, sometimes on a camel. He rides much—always riding—always watching—watching—watching for something out of the desert."

The entire circle of warriors uttered a sibilant sigh. The vision seemed clearer to El Fetnah. She spoke more sharply, more certainly.

"There are others with him, following him as if he is the leader. His skin is not black. He is not fat, nor is he short in stature. Wait! He is not tall! He is of moderate height. He carries weapons, and those who follow him carry weapons—riding fast. Dust! Much clattering of weapons! He sees— By Allah, this is strange! He talks with short jerky gestures—so! And I think—" El Fetnah's voice became slightly strained, slightly anxious to the attentive ears of Cohusac—"I think his skin is fair—fairer than that of a woman— Am I right, O Sheik?"

"Correct!" said Ali bin Godi, clearing his throat nervously. "Continue! Name of the Prophet!"

El Fetnah withdrew her eyes for an instant and looked up to the stars with an expression of intense concentration. In the darkness the white eyeballs of the Somalis gleamed. Hypnotized, these nomads saw nothing, heard nothing, except this mysterious woman and the words that fell from her lips. All at once she said quietly—

"Your enemy is a white man!"

Involuntarily Cohusac shrank in his garments.

"Where is he?" yelled the sheik explosively.

"He is a white man," El Fetnah continued briskly, pressing her palms together with her fingers to her lips, "with hair the color of sand when the sun strikes it in the evening. His eyes are blue. There are yellow spots upon his skin. He has a mustache. He speaks sharply, impatiently, like a Frangi who has authority. Ah, by Allah, he is a commander of troops!" All at once her voice rose with a startled note. "O Sheik! O brother! See to your camels quickly! Mount! Mount! Children of the desert, in the name of Allah! Your enemy approaches!"

Sheik Ali bin Godi leaped up, hesitating for a moment, glaring down uncertainly at El Fetnah. The circle scattered, the frightened women running to the tents, the boys racing away. The warriors waited impatiently, some with eyes fastened on their leader, some turning their faces away, listening for sounds out of the night. A tumult arose in the camp as the fodder was snatched from the mouths of the camels and the women began to strike their flimsy tents. There came the sound of horses' hoofs splashing through the sand.

Scouts broke through the circle. Hardly pausing to salute the sheik, they brought word that a force of the constabulary was approaching from the south

Leaving Ali bin Godi staring down with burning eyes at El Fetnah, the warriors raced to their chargers.

"There is still a doubt in my mind concerning you," said he.

"Son of Eblis," cried El Fetnah with a sudden gust of fury, "is it possible you do not yet recognize me?"

"Who are you?" demanded the sheik stubbornly.

"I am El Fetnah!"

Flinging himself on the sand at El Fetnah's feet, Ali bin Godi gasped:

"May Allah forgive! The blame is on me! May Allah forgive!"

"Go, then, in the name of Allah," said El Fetnah. "For myself I travel by another road."

The awed sheik, rising tremblingly to his feet, backed away into the darkness.

Cohusac heard him a moment later yelling wildly for his horse.

In a few minutes the tumult of the encampment began to die away. The nomads, being in enemy country, were in readiness to strike their tents at an instant's notice. Cohusac placed more fuel on the dying fire, puzzled and disturbed.

"O sister," said he hesitantly, "why, I beg of you, are you called 'The Storm?' "

"My names have significance among the superstitious who know me."

Cohusac smiled knowingly.

"What!" demanded El Fetnah. "Do you also question the power of my faculties?"

"By my beard, am I not a brother to you?" protested Cohusac ironically. "Though you see in me a frail hunchback, do not forget that I have in this head a large brain. I am not exactly a stupid *fellahin*, nor am I a wild superstitious *bedawin*. No, by Allah! I have seen such tricks before. Every Armenian can read the face as if it were an open book. In Beyrout I have seen it done many times. The method is simple. You merely state a likely generalization, and as you perceive the yes or the no in the man's countenance you advance to the more particular description. There is exceeding cleverness in the art, but Allah knows, it *is* an art."

"At least you believe I described a real person?" said El Fetnah.

By feigning a look of startled mystification, Cohusac saved himself from betrayal. She had described Nobby Hickson to the life!

"May I be smitten!" he gasped. "*Is* there such a one?"

"Presently," said El Fetnah quietly, "you will see him."

Cohusac looked quickly right and left over his shoulder into the darkness.

"You who are so clever," said El Fetnah suavely, "take up a stick and write in the sand where I can not by any possibility see it. You have studied at the college of the Frangi? Write therefore a sequence of numerals—no more than five. You have written? Good. Now write above it the same sequence reversed. The difference between those numbers is 41,976."

It took Cohusac a full minute to make the subtraction with the aid of the figures plainly before him in the sand. He was stunned. Even though it were simple arithmetic it seemed to him a marvelous mental feat for a woman to retain that handful of numerals in her mind and to give a correct solution instantaneously. But there was something more marvelous than this. It was a physical impossibility for her to have seen the writing on the sand, and since Cohusac had not uttered a sound, how—how did she know what the numbers were in his mind?

Cohusac prostrated himself at El Fetnah's feet, murmuring to himself:

"Now how the devil did she do that? This is something for the attention of the Academy."

El Fetnah prevented any comment with a sibilant warning—

"By Allah, he is already here!"

Nobby Hickson walked casually into the circle of light, followed by a couple of askaris.

ATTENUATED by the hot sun and scorching winds of Somaliland, restless, quick in his movements, his bloodshot blue eyes stabbing here and there observing everything, his thin bleached khaki showing signs of hard wear, Hickson seemed to Cohusac's astounded eyes exactly as he had appeared a fortnight ago on the roof of the Frenchman's quarters in Aden.

But what a change in Cohusac!

Cohusac restrained the impulse to give a shout. Fortunately his back was turned to El Fetnah. Hickson looked at him stonily.

"*Salaam!* What brings you people here?" said he in choppy Arabic. "Can you show passports?"

"It is those cursed Somalis!" wailed El Fetnah sharply. "Oy-yoy! Oy-yoy! Oy-yoy! They have robbed us and they have brought ruin to us. Curse their children! May hoof-rot wipe out their cattle! Oy-yoy! Allah is my witness! They have taken all my possessions, and now the British will persecute me because I have no papers! O Allah, protect the widow—"

In the midst of this sudden wailing Cohusac said under his breath—

"Nobby!"

Hickson's neck shot out, his eyes protruding as he glared into Cohusac's shadowed countenance.

"*Effendi*," stammered Cohusac, choking with the effort, "I swear what the lady says is the simple truth! Behold, we were only one day on our journey—her lord, Sudi bin Ismael, the merchant of Djibouti and myself, with horses and donkeys. By Allah, Excellency, who could anticipate danger?"

"Oy-yoy! Oy-yoy!" El Fetnah was rocking violently back and forth, sobbing, her face buried in the folds of her *chamma*.

Cohusac broke into a sobbing protest:

"Sir, they attacked us, pretending friendship. Believe me, though Allah molded me for a troubadour— See, sir, there is my lute—I fought like a lion!"

"Where is this Sudi bin Ismael?"

El Fetnah shrieked as if stricken to the heart; and while the sound rang in their ears, Hickson gasped in Cohusac's face—

"Why keep it up?"

"Going to Harrar!" murmured Cohusac. Aloud he faltered:

"Excellency, my lord Sudi is dead. You are too late. All we ask is a little food, in the name of Allah! A little food, and—by Allah's compassion, my lord, friend of the poor!—a cigaret!"

"Oy-yoy!" moaned El Fetnah, tossing sand on her head. "They robbed me of my beloved! Like a straight palm-tree stricken with an ax, they cut him down! O Allah! Vengeance! Vengeance for the widow—"

Her words became lost in a spasm of dry sobs.

"She is a genius," whispered Cohusac. "Zut! Isn't she wonderful?"

Hickson ordered his *askaris* to bring food and a blanket for the woman and began a rapid fire of questions concerning details of the raid. Cohusac surmised it would appear obvious to El Fetnah that her hunchback troubadour, no matter how boldly he had supported her in her acting, would be sufficiently frightened to feel justified in telling the truth about the presence of Sheik Ali bin Sudi. Therefore he did so, loudly, passionately, calling upon Allah to witness how like a lion he had fought, shedding blood. And here he had the blood of the unfortunate suitor's stump to testify to his bravery.

Hickson thereupon dragged him away to point out where the camp had been placed. And when he got him well alone, beyond hearing of his own men or of El Fetnah, he grasped him by the arms.

"How the dickens did you do it? The entire coast has been patroled for two days. We spotted the *Vixen* shelling the dhow; but—so help me Bob!—I can't see how you made a getaway."

Cohusac explained disparagingly, flinging his hands out with a perfect Arab gesture of indifference.

"But who is the *bibi?*" persisted Hickson.

With perfect unconsciousness the Frenchman made another Arab gesture. With a waving upward gesture of his hand he touched the tips of his thumb and forefinger, murmuring ecstatically—

"She is a pearl!"

"So that's it," grunted Hickson.

"No, that is not it! She's on her way to Harrar—to Lidj Yassou; and I am keeping close to her. I intend to see the prince myself. Am I reasonably well disguised?"

"Extraordinary!"

"That is some satisfaction. Would you believe I jumped on a man tonight and tried to knife him?"

"Why?"

Cohusac explained.

"But," asked Hickson perplexed, "was this woman, who is on her way to join the Prince of Abyssinia, willing to go along with a dirty *bedawin?*"

"Certainly not!" said Cohusac indignantly.

"Well, then," said Hickson beaming,

"there's no tribal custom that would compel her. Her consent is essential."

Cohusac clapped his hand to his forehead.

"Murderously jealous," muttered Hickson, with twitching lips.

"No, no, no!" protested Cohusac. "Make no mistake on that point. I give you my word, *copain*, there is something behind all this which some day I'll explain, if Allah wills. As for the woman, no! There is no sentimental interest there, except, of course," he added naïvely, "that she is a beauty. Never have I seen any one like her. Marvelous, truly! But—well, I am afraid of her!"

"Afraid!"

"She is a devil! Positively. Imagine a woman who can smile with satisfaction at the cutting off of a man's hand; who would have no hesitation at disemboweling you with a razor-edged *jambeer* because of a mere slip of the tongue! Imagine—"

Hickson made a grimace of distaste.

"Still," murmured Cohusac as an afterthought, "it's wonderful, eh? Such fire!" He gave a sudden start. "*Diable!* I can't stay here talking—it will rouse her suspicions! Let's be quick—follow what I say! The tribes of Somalis and Danakils are being aroused and are trekking toward Harrar. The object appears to be for the prince to declare for Islam in Harrar, and with his Mohammedan allies establish his capital there. The fate of the present capital will be decided by intrigue in Addis-Abeba itself and this demonstration of force from the south."

"Yes," said Hickson.

"Can the prince do it?"

"It is quite possible. There are tremendous forces behind him. Don't you think it would be best for me to arrest this woman and get what information I can?"

"By no means! She is my pilot. Most of the information I have given you is through her."

"Then she's more valuable in your custody."

"She's an extraordinary one," said Cohusac uneasily. "A mind-reader! Give us a donkey and a guide to Djibouti, and let me return. I'm afraid of her, I tell you!"

When Cohusac sidled into the firelight again, El Fetnah lifted her dark eyes with a look that pierced him. But Cohusac had anticipated this. As her look fell upon him, his thoughts were upon his "poor mamma in France!" All that El Fetnah saw was a sallow, dejected countenance and misted, pitiful eyes.

Cohusac told her with perfect plausibleness that the English colonel had offered to provide them with a donkey, a guide and food enough to get them to Djibouti; but there was the proviso that they must report to the French authorities upon their arrival in Djibouti.

"That is nothing," said El Fetnah. "These English are stupid!"

The night was still hot and quiet, but with a full belly and a package of cigarets at his disposal, Cohusac actually enjoyed the march. With the guide leading, and El Fetnah and the light bundles on the back of the donkey, Cohusac followed behind where, in the darkness, he could straighten his back and walk with a swinging stride. He found to his astonishment that the weakness that had made him apparently a hopeless invalid had most certainly passed. His nerves no longer made him wince at shocks. On the contrary they seemed to tingle with reviving pleasure in existence.

The ugliness of the road was softened by the darkness of night. The velvet blueness of the sky, with the stars and planets glowing and sparkling with many colors, the smell of the sea mingling with the hot aromatic breath of the desert aroused his romantic imagination. Shuffling along, he sang. He took his mandolin from the donkey, and even played as he walked, the music sounding very beautiful in the softness of the night. But this time, recalling with a tremor that El Fetnah was undoubtedly familiar with both English and French, he sang his English words with the intonation of an Arab:

"Th' howl an'th' buusie-kart went to es-sea—
To es-sea ina beegreen bot!"

"Ah," said El Fetnah in English, turning her head, "you speak English? I thought when I heard those words before that they were vaguely familiar. They are more clear now. I recognize them."

"Es-sure!" said Cohusac, paralyzed for a second. "All right. Jolly good! Not es-so mooch! *Impshi*, you —— fool!"

"I prefer your singing, *ya homar!*"

After ten miles, having crossed the frontier into French Somaliland, they slept. Next morning they procured horses at the first village and rode swiftly on to Djibouti, where they arrived before nightfall.

El Fetnah went directly to the Hotel Continental, where in the cosmopolitan medley of guests her identity could best be hidden. Cohusac fraternized with the Arab servants, and at a price procured the use of a *charpoy*, which he dragged into the shadow near the kitchen door. Pulling the folds of his turban over his face, he huddled on the ropes and slept.

WHEN Cohusac awoke, the kerosene-oxygen lights were blazing and flickering under the corrugated roof that sheltered the iron tables by the street. The stumpy palms by the sidewalk looked like stage-props in the bluish light. Dilapidated old victorias were drawn up at the curb. The crowd at the tables was a startling confusion of Frenchmen, Syrians, Arabs, Greeks, Indians, Abyssinians, Somalis, weaving in and out, sipping their drinks, selling curios, reading newspapers and bulletins, arguing, singing, shouting.

The dining-room fronted on this terrace. Within, guests were eating, while overburdened servants shuffled confusedly in and out of the kitchen. Flies swarmed over everything; each hot light was clouded with insects.

Cohusac moved inconspicuously through this crowd. He located El Fetnah at one of the tables on the terrace, where he found her in the company of a good looking Greek trader. At first this discovery startled him, but then he reflected that El Fetnah was not a casual adventuress. She was the spirit of an intrigue of terrific potentialities, and as such she undoubtedly would be able to form connections with agents in every center of importance in northern Africa. It shook him a bit to consider that he was perhaps the only secret agent of the Allies who had succeeded in forming a personal association with her. Nevertheless, he did not obtrude.

Making his way among the tables, cadging a cigaret here, playing a bit of music there, joking, bantering, wheedling baksheesh out of customers, Cohusac both passed the time agreeably and profitably. Among other things he learned that the motley crowd consisted chiefly of refugees from the hinterland who had fled from Abyssinia and Somaliland, leaving the railroad and telegraph lines behind them cut in many places.

Abyssinia, in short, was cut off completely from the rest of the world, and no one knew exactly what dark tragedy was being enacted there. Cohusac felt somewhat like Michael Strogoff on the day of his departure for Siberia, cut off from Russia by the Tatars. A feeling of terrible unrest was passing through northeast Africa. The appalling effrontery of the Danakil and Somali raiding parties who had covered the railroad line could not be satisfactorily explained by a mere lust for copper wire and iron rails out of which to manufacture bangles and spears.

There was a feeling that something titanic was about to happen, though no one in that crowd, with the exception of about five individuals, could tell what.

Despite the uncertainty the crowd was cheerful. There had been fighting by Abyssinian troops up the line, and it was understood that the inland empire intended to strain every effort to open the line and resume traffic. A rumor was being passed around that a guarded train would attempt to get through to Dire-Daoua on the following day. Dire-Daoua was the station at which passengers descended in order to reach Harrar, thirty miles across hilly country.

When Cohusac heard this he immediately sought El Fetnah, and found her at the same table with the same Greek as formerly.

"Good, O Hussein," El Fetnah murmured. "Tomorrow stay near me. If Allah wills, we will take the train to Dire-Daoua and proceed by horse to Harrar. The tickets have been bought. Others are also making the trip. At Dire-Daoua there will be horses ready for a fast ride!"

DAYLIGHT had hardly flashed upon the world, flooding the white-and-yellow country with its overpowering heat, when the migration began. That little world in motley scampered to the train. The Levant, Asia Minor and Africa lifted their togas and raced for position. A long train of various types of cars, like old-fashioned toy trains of painted wood. The passengers, however, were wildly animated. Black arms waved, white teeth gleamed, a dozen languages were being yelled at once. Entire families—men, women and children, with their most precious furniture on their heads or in their arms—pushed frantically for space.

The little locomotive blew steam into the air from innumerable vents. It whistled with tremendous arrogance; gathered itself together and flung itself into its collar. The wheels spun on already shimmering steel. It flung itself forward again, caught a foothold, began to move. A great shout of delight and surprize went up from the passengers.

El Fetnah's agents had secured for her a compartment in the second-class which she shared with them in comparative comfort and seclusion. Cohusac established himself in a corner near the platform, where by curses and the display of a startling fierceness he managed to ward off unwelcome intrusion. Having provided himself with some packages of chocolate, a large lump of dates, a French loaf and a roast chicken, he felt sufficiently armed against emergency. He had even indulged in the affectation of a small pottery narghileh, which he felt would add considerably to his dignity. Priming this at the first opportunity, he sat in a blue haze of smoke, with eyes half-closed, sucking luxuriously with a bubbling sound of contentment.

Crowded in a corner, it was difficult for him to see much of the landscape, but so long as they were passing through French Somaliland there was little for him to miss—a desolate, parched desert country of rocks and sand and sun-baked clay. No water, no life of any sort—a country that had died early without much struggle.

At Daounle, however, ninety kilometers beyond Djibouti, he managed to thrust his head out the doorway for a sight of the frontier post, and there on top of a rock was a little French fort with the beloved tricolor hanging against a whitish sky. Above the station platform was another tricolor, of green, red, and yellow. He was in Abyssinia.

"Zut!" said Cohusac and drew heavily on his narghileh.

The desert here had fought for life. For many kilometers beyond, it was violently contorted by volcanic upheavals. Abysses, strata upended and twisted in knots, heaped-up rocks of igneous formation, red, yellow, black—it seemed like a monstrous *cheveaux-de-frise* designed by nature to turn aside human migrations toward the highlands.

Panting upward steadily, the train began to reach the higher plains and broader valleys where forest and grass indicated the passing of the desert.

Signs of life now appeared—of life and human devastation.

There were innumerable halts. The telegraph line had to be repaired constantly.

At the forlorn railroad stations, cement blocks standing in the midst of shimmering plains or under the edge of bleak mountains, reluctant *evacuées* descended to return to their abandoned posts, facing uneasily their neighbors who hung about curiously eying them—dirty Dankalis with tousled mops of red-dyed hair, dressed with wooden combs, leaning with an air of amused confidence on their long polished spears; or tall cleanly Somalis in snowy-white togas, also leaning on spears, staring with grins or an insolent tilt of their chins. Some of the stations had been burned. At places along the track were the carcasses of many cattle slaughtered by raiders, the bones of men killed and thrown alongside the rails.

The Somalis, insolent to every other race in the world, lost much of their boisterous assurance in the presence of the Abyssinians.

In the last car of the train was an Abyssinian guard of soldiers. These men were hardly in evidence at any of the stops until the middle of the afternoon, when rounding a mountain buttress, they came upon a large permanent town of Somalis whose *tokhuls* of mud-and-wattle walls and thatched roofs occupied a considerable area. The station, at the skirts of this settlement, was occupied by an Italian and his family, one of the few who had not left his post at the first outbreaks.

As the train rounded the buttress with a shriek of the whistle, a roar of rage went up from the passengers who were craning their heads out of the windows. The village Somalis were caught red-handed attacking the station.

The outhouses had already been completely looted and were burning, and the warriors, charging up to the doors and barricaded windows, were thrusting their spears through every aperture, yelling, laughing, dancing nimbly away when the barrel of an old Lebel rifle was poked in their direction. A little blue haze of smoke showed that the station-master had every intention of dying game. With the wires down, and no communication along the line for many days, he could not have possibly known that rescue was at hand.

At sight of the train, he instantly flung open his door and rushed out, firing point-blank at his assailants, followed by his fat wife and daughter, one with a shovel, the other with a pistol in her hand, all shouting wildly:

"*Á moi! Á moi! Sauvages!*"

Like game-cocks flung into a pit, the Abyssinians left the train while it was still in motion and went at their enemies flying.

Cohusac was brought out of his doze by a spear which clattered through the window and pinned his *kansa* to the floor. The uproar of shouts, rifles firing, women jabbering brought him to his feet.

"Zut!" said he with complete comprehension. "We are in Abyssinia!"

As he came on the platform and saw the bearded Italian station-master fighting his way out, followed by his women, Cohusac jerked a rifle from the hands of an Armenian who had sunk below a window-sill murmuring petitions. The Frenchman jumped down to the ground, firing coolly.

In a few minutes the Somalis, thus surprized, broke.

The Abyssinians then swarmed through the village, firing the thatch until a sheet of flame swept over it, driving the tribesmen out on to the hot flat plain where they fled from ant-hill to ant-hill, chased madly by the infuriated Abyssinians until the whistle of the locomotive recalled them.

The entire action had taken only about fifteen minutes. In twenty minutes the train was once more on its way, headed toward the blue mountains that began to loom large upon the horizon; but it had awakened the dozing passengers to a new interest in the state of the country.

"They are vicious!" exclaimed the awed Armenian when Cohusac returned the borrowed rifle. "Who would have supposed Somalis would be so bold at this short distance from Harrar?"

"Not you, by Allah?" said Cohusac.

He went to the door of El Fetnah's compartment and looked in with a grin, asking whether they were satisfied with such music.

"You handle a rifle as well as a lute, O Hussein," observed El Fetnah.

"By Allah," exclaimed Cohusac hurriedly, "because you see me a cripple now, I beg of you not to think I came into the world in this form. Behold I was as straight as a palm-tree until I fell into the hands of that cursed mob of apes in

Beyrout. Alas, I was once in the Lebanon militia."

"An excellent militia," said El Fetnah.

Cohusac went back to his mat and, again priming his narghileh, began to ponder. Was it possible this woman could read his thoughts? The idea angered him. He went over in his mind again and again that startling flash of prescience with which she had solved the problem of arithmetic. He considered it step by step, exclaiming with exasperation. At length he borrowed a pencil and paper from the Armenian and wrote down the numerals to fix them in his mind.

Curious, as are all members of his race in anything that involves figures, the Armenian showed interest. Cohusac explained the problem to him. The Armenian burst into laughter.

"Well, by Allah, yes, ha-ha!" said Cohusac indignantly. "But what is the meaning of your hyena-like commentary? You were singing in a different key a moment ago."

"Pardon," said the Armenian sniggering, "but the problem is a boy's trick. See!" He took the paper and wrote down a series of varying sequences similar to Cohusac's, made the subtractions, and showed the hunchback the answers. The answers were all identical. The solution was invariable! El Fetnah's mind-reading had been based simply upon a good memory.

Cohusac clapped his hand to his forehead, and the Armenian shouted with laughter, unrebuked.

This began a conversation that continued on through the increasing darkness until the train drew up at Dire-Daoua. Then came shouts and ringing of bells and a great flaring of lights as the train discharged its noisy cargo and the invaders poured into the town.

Cohusac stuck to El Fetnah, but he was no longer in awe of her. His innate flippancy had now the ascendancy. Nevertheless he preserved his rôle carefully. The woman had no answers for him. Her eyes burned deeply; her thoughts seemed miles away. Only one thing seemed to animate her—the necessity of speeding on to Harrar immediately.

She and her followers hurried through the broad streets unnoticed in the darkness and the confusion that followed the arrival of the train. The little hotel was a blaze of lights, but the hills that rose about the town pressed in somberly.

At the camel-inn horses were waiting for them, and Cohusac found himself mounted comfortably. The ride over the mountains would have been thoroughly impossible if a quartering moon had not spread a silver glow over the broken country, making the trail clear enough for Abyssinian horses.

Observing that his mount was equipped with native stirrups in which he could insert only his big toes, grunted Cohusac—

"Is this cursed haste absolutely necessary?"

"It is a race," said El Fetnah. "There has been a stroke at Addis-Abeba. The prince has been deposed. Ras Taffari, though he knows it not, will be declared regent. The Prince Lidj Yassou must strike now—tonight—or he is lost! All is lost!"

The horses clattered out of the yard, into the shadow of the mountain, and broke into a fast canter until they were well away from the town, when they slowed down sharply.

"Now," said El Fetnah, turning to Cohusac, "take up your lute and play. Make it lively, O brother, and mix laughter with it."

Puzzled, Cohusac unlaced the instrument, tuned up hastily and sweeping his hand across the strings, he began to shout "Funicula" at the top of his voice. He started in too high a key and forgot the words. His voice broke shrilly on a thin strained note as he yelled desperately:

"La-le! La-le! La-de-da-de-deee!
Funicula! Funiculi!"

Clutching weakly at the horses' manes, the riders choked spasmodically. The horses shied. El Fetnah, for the first time since Cohusac had known her, burst into ringing laughter. It was minutes before they could compose themselves.

Indignant, Cohusac attempted a spluttering explanation. This only added to the mirth. The small group had every appearance of a ribald company when a patrol of Abyssinians rode out of the shadows to the south and challenged them.

Laughing explanations were made that they were on their way to a festival in Harrar as entertainers for Prince Lidj Yassou, and they were permitted to pass.

A few minutes later, El Fetnah struck her horse sharply.

"Now, brothers, ride! Death to the infidel! *Deen Mohammed!*"

"*Deen Mohammed!*" exclaimed the riders.

Cohusac's horse was dealt a blow over the withers, and he saved himself only by clutching the mane. El Fetnah was flying before him like a dark shadow, sweeping from hillock to hillock, but her escort lagged behind. Cohusac had no choice. He hung on desperately, hoping to heaven that his mount would not strike a boulder or tumble into a *donga*.

After they had traversed almost a mile at this pace, El Fetnah slowed down, and Cohusac's horse gladly settled into a steadier gait. They went on then at a trot, breaking occasionally into a light canter. Once when they pulled down to a walk, they heard very faintly on the clear still air the sound of shots.

El Fetnah started violently, then dropped her face into her hands, murmuring a prayer to Allah. The next instant she said harshly:

"Nothing can stop us! Ride!"

Again she was off at a gallop.

Cohusac needed every gasp of breath to hold to his horse and keep up, but he rode in a dream. Everything was dark, mysterious, disordered. Hitherto he had followed events with sufficient understanding, but now his mind was in confusion. The one thing that gave him confidence was his realization that there was nothing extraordinary in El Fetnah's powers. She possessed nothing of the occult. She was merely a fanatical woman elevated to a high plane by a great and terrible mission.

Her trick upon him had this effect: It taught him her weakness, and it awoke in his own mind a recollection of all the tricks he had ever heard of being performed by mind-readers, magicians and fake mediums.

Once as they slowed up, he ventured to ask—

"Does Prince Lidj Yassou expect you?"

"Yes," said El Fetnah, "but Maukara is in Harrar. He also has been informed and is watching for me."

"Where is Ras Taffari, the new regent?"

"We have left him behind in Dire-Daoua. If we establish ourselves in Harrar tomorrow, he will be helpless. Everything depends upon the prince acting boldly and bravely."

They approached Harrar at midnight, passing through vast plantations of coffee bushes, along which had come the first Arab discoverers of coffee many centuries before.

At the Lion Gate they were halted sharply by Abyssinian sentries; but these had already been instructed to permit El Fetnah and escort to pass. They were guided through the sleeping city to the great rambling cement block, rising like a lump of sugar in the moonlight, where the prince had established his quarters after returning from Jigjiga. There were lights in this miserable palace of a prince, and they found the prince still holding carouse—drinking, eating, playing merrily with the young Mohammedan wives of his new *harim*.

This was the evening of the day he had lost an empire!

EL FETNAH had not exaggerated the possible conquests that lay before Lidj Yassou. His cousin, Ras Taffari, in a similar situation might have taken up the green banner and again carried it across northern Africa in sweeping conquests to Spain, where Boabdil had commenced the retrograde movement of the Mohammedan empire four hundred years before. Or Ras Mikael, King of Wallo, might have succeeded, as he nearly succeeded with a fresh impulse several months later.

The details and plans for these vast conquests were already clear in the mind of El Fetnah. But she was no warrior; it was necessary for a man to lead troops in battle. Lidj Yassou, who had been seduced from his ancient Christian beliefs by means of artful intrigue and blandishments that inflated his head out of all proportion to his abilities, appeared to be the logical one.

El Fetnah went to him, therefore, as Joan of Arc went to the Dauphin at Rheims to redeem France, inspiring him to the reconquest of his dominions. But what a difference!

El Fetnah found Lidj Yassou squatted on his haunches on a divan that had been arranged for him in true Mohammedan style. Rich rugs were scattered carelessly on the floor. A gasoline lamp standing there flared and flickered. Heavy draperies hung over the arched windows. Boxes of candies stood about; wine had been spilled; a tabouret was wet with rose sherbet, and flies clung to it. The stifling atmosphere was heavy with French and Egyptian perfumes. Silk lingerie, stockings, Parisian finery were scattered everywhere.

As El Fetnah, with Cohusac trailing humbly behind as servitor, entered the room, giggles sounded from the adjoining compartments.

It was perfectly obvious that the prince had hurriedly dismissed his women in order to receive this mysterious emissary of the caliph. He sat without moving, looking at her stupidly, his large, full face, which might had been handsome had dissipation and weakness not marred it, showing not a single shadow of anything that might inspire confidence and respect.

El Fetnah halted in the middle of the room, frowning with disgust and indignation. She had come inspired by a lofty cause and was still confident of its realization. To her the prince was of no great importance except as a symbol of leadership, but his leadership was immediately essential. He must strike tonight!

With dignity El Fetnah delivered her message. The prince responded with a vacant smile—

"Come sit beside me!"

Giggles sounded from the adjoining room. El Fetnah exclaimed fiercely:

"If you are not at the head of a thousand warriors before daybreak you are a lost man! The world of Islam is waiting for you to strike the first blow! Have you not yet heard that the assembly of *rases* at Addis-Abeba has deposed you? You must strike tonight, by Allah!"

The prince leered at her.

"Don't be so tragic," he begged. "I have just come from Jigjiga. The Somalis are good friends of mine. With me at their head we will march into Addis-Abeba any time I wish. Besides, my father will come with armies from Tigré in the north whenever I ask. Please don't get excited. Here, sit beside me. You look more beautiful than any of my women! How does that happen? They said I was to have the most beautiful of all. Come! Here is a sherbet—or candy. Women like candy."

With a furious gesture El Fetnah said hoarsely:

"*Bismillah!* A prophecy! If before the morning prayer you are not assembling your forces for battle, you will be a fugitive despised by all!"

"Stop!" said the prince sullenly, raising a hand. "You are addressing an emperor!"

"Sir, have you shown the courtesy that should be granted me, an emissary of the caliph?"

"A woman! A woman! I am surprized at the caliph! Oh, yes, yes!" he added with a sudden flash of startled interest. "I have waited a long while to see you. I want some magic! See, I have your amulet about my neck. Forgive me," he said, scrambling to his feet, but not daring to move forward because of the dizziness of his head. "I did not mean to offend. Everything depends on your magic! Yes, everything, by Allah!"

"Everything depends on Allah and your courage."

"No, no! You don't know what's inside me here. I have visions, too. I see things. Mohammed saw visions. I wait. I wait. Show me the power of your magic. If it is good, I swear by St. George—I beg pardon, Allah! I swear by my ancestor, the Imam, I will strike tonight—now!"

El Fetnah could not move. What agony there was in her soul Cohusac could only guess. The world lay open to easy conquest by a man of strength or agility or striking initiative. She had been led to believe this Lidj Yassou was such a one. And behold, he was nothing but a debauched, superstitious dolt!

"If I could only startle him into action," El Fetnah murmured. "He must act tonight!"

The giggles from the adjoining chamber became squeals. The prince called out gaily, wandering blithely from the somber to the frivolous with drunken indifference.

Thrilled with a dazzling flash of inspiration, Cohusac plucked at El Fetnah's sleeve.

"O sister, I have a magic of my own! Promise a seance!"

"What!"

"Promise," urged Cohusac with startling vehemence, "promise to call up a spirit of the dead. I swear by the Fatha! Hear me, I swear by the Fatha to produce a ghost!"

"What is this talk?" said the prince, sleepily resentful.

Desperate, feeling the necessity for any diversion that might enable her to collect her thoughts, El Fetnah said:

"*Taib!* O Prince, you have lightly asked for a terrible thing. So be it! We may justify it in the name of Allah. For Allah's glory we conquer. If you will compose yourself I will call back a spirit from the dead!"

"A ghost! No, that is a little too much! I am in no mood for ghosts."

"I will bring him into this room, in no disagreeable form, to speak to you. Command, O Prince, is obedience!"

"Well, all right," said the prince, "but I want my wives near me!"

El Fetnah retired to the doorway, motioning away the attendant, and stared at Cohusac with eyes of doom. But Cohusac no longer feared those eyes. He stared back with an hypnotic gaze, and El Fetnah seemed to recognize for the first time in the hunchback's face a cast of countenance remarkably like the Frangi's conception of Mephistopheles.

"What is this madness?" she whispered with agitation.

"Have faith in me, O my sister," said Cohusac earnestly. "Do exactly as I tell you, and be surprized at nothing! First, the prince and all his wives are to sit in a circle on the floor, arms linked tightly, all facing inward. You must be one of the circle, facing the prince. The room must be in complete darkness. When this is done, sober the women with words. Your affair is to arouse the prince to a great expectation. When the psychological moment arrives, ask him to call in his own voice to one of the dead. Then, I warn you, be not frightened. If you feel a stirring near you, remember I have powers you do not comprehend! Pay no attention to it, except perhaps to groan."

"*Taib,*" said El Fetnah dazedly.

Hesitating, anxious, for the first time in many years feeling distrustful of her own faculties, she turned back dubiously to the prince. Reflecting that even if nothing were manifested, no harm could come of it since an excuse could readily be made for reluctant spirits, El Fetnah finally plucked up determination and repeated Cohusac's instructions with impressive assurance.

Cohusac himself assisted in arranging the heavy draperies of the window apertures and doorways so that not a ray of light could penetrate, but he was obliged to leave the room when the ladies of the *harim* entered. While the lights were being extinguished, he located the water *chatty* outside the door and poured himself a drink to refresh his parched throat. The guard watching him incuriously from the other end of the corridor saw nothing extraordinary in his goings and comings.

Within the stuffy chamber El Fetnah took her place opposite the prince, whose superstitious mind was already beginning to exert a sobering influence upon him. The circle formed. The room was plunged in darkness. The giggling of the light-headed concubines gradually turned into nervous titters. Finally there was an awed silence.

After a moment the silence was broken by faint gasping murmurs of prayer from El Fetnah. The entwined arms became more and more rigid as the tension increased. Breaths were bated. A sense of premonition, of expectancy, swept the circle in an almost palpable quiver.

"Now," sighed El Fetnah in an agitated voice.

The prince attempted to speak, but could find no words.

"Now! Now!" whispered El Fetnah tensely. "Call! Call to him!"

"Grandfather?" murmured the prince in a scared tone.

"Louder!"

"Grandfather!"

Nothing happened. Then one of the girls, about to titter nervously, choked. The circle stiffened rigidly as terror swept through the room.

A luminous glow was floating in the air above the divan where the prince had been squatting. As the watchers gazed it grew in size, taking form—a thin tenuous wraith. Swaying, swaying it drifted to the floor, diminishing gradually into nothing. When it had completely disappeared, there was a sigh of breath being expelled and a rustling as every one in the circle began to shake. All at once they stiffened again with sharp terror.

There was the light hovering over their heads—in the middle of the circle! A vague nebulous glow, bluish, palpitant. As the straining horrified eyes watched it, it began to grow again, swaying, tenuous, almost transparent, yet palpitant with life. Again it diminished, very slowly, drifting about the circle, the women bowing their heads with eyes closed, shrinking from it.

When it had completely disappeared the second time and all continued to sit there rigid, not daring to move, a cool breath all at once fanned Lidj Yassou's cheek. Cohusac achieved the cleverest stroke in the entire war by murmuring in a dying whisper—

"*Beware! Islam is death!*"

Stunned for an instant as if struck a blow, the prince suddenly gave a choked yell of horror and began frantically to struggle to his feet. Instantly there were screams of terror and confusion. The women rushed from the room into the corridor.

At their cries for help the guards came running. Lights were lighted. The prince was assisted to the divan, rolling his eyes wildly, talking thickly, incoherently, stupid with fear. The women were huddled into the *harimlik* where they took courage in chatter.

El Fetnah left the room in a daze, her eyes distended, shaken to the soul. Cohusac was standing at the door as she passed, but he shrank away, not daring to rouse her until he could safely leave the building.

An hour later, Maukara, the Black Vengeance, heard the news of Lidj Yassou's overthrow by the council at Addis-Abeba.

Two hours later Maukara had seized control of the city and struck.

THE sun was not yet full up when the Abyssinians of Harrar fell upon the Somalis, and a frightful massacre ensued. There was carnage throughout the day, and the dogs fed well. Blood flowed until the British consul went to Maukara and begged him in the name of humanity to sheathe the simitar.

Meanwhile the prince and some of his concubines escaped with a small troop in a wild chase out on to the plains of the Ogaden in the direction of his beloved Jigjiga. Days later he returned with a small army of Somali horsemen, but was routed and scattered by the soldiers of Ras Taffari, the new regent of Abyssinia.

Lidj Yassou again escaped and this time fled into the desert wastes of Danakil where the rivers of Abyssinia disappear in the sands.

SOME days after the massacre, Nobby Hickson managed to reach Harrar, having chased Sheik Ali across the border. Delighted at the turn events had taken and eager to get some inside information, he combed the Abyssinian city to find Cohusac. The Frenchman had established himself guardian over a group from Lidj Yassou's *harim!*

"Not," he explained to Hickson, "that I have any sentimental interest in them, but they think I'm in league with the devil—and there are extraordinary possibilities for hearing valuable news in that rôle. Mephistopheles has a wide circle of interesting acquaintances."

"Oh, quite," observed Nobby, listening with one ear to rather tantalizing whispers in a neighboring room.

"They constitute a library of the prince's past exploits, too," observed Cohusac.

"And the latest addition to the set—Sudi bin Ismael's *bibi?* Where is she?"

Cohusac shrugged uneasily.

"Without her assistance I could never have fooled that idiot prince."

"Ah! You haven't quite fully explained yet how it was done."

"Simple." Cohusac lighted a cigaret, and tossed the box of matches to his friend. "Here is the chief prop! I wrapped myself in the woman's black cloak and pulled a pair of stockings over my arms. I took a box of matches and soaked them with water from the *chatty* and rubbed my girdle with the phosphorus. Before Lidj Yassou called I was actually in the room, with the girdle hidden in the cloak. Then when he said 'Grandfather!' I stood on the divan and exposed the girdle bit by bit, waving it and withdrawing it. Afterward I went inside the circle and repeated the performance. Finally, I said lugubriously in the prince's ear, 'Islam is death!' *Wallah*, the act was perfect! It was hard not to laugh."

"So help me Bob!" murmured Hickson after a moment of speechless admiration. "But there—where on earth did you get the idea?"

Cohusac smirked slightly at the glowing end of his cigaret.

"I once saw a lady wading through phosphorescent water at night. The effect was startling."

"I see," murmured Hickson. As fuller comprehension dawned, he suddenly grinned delightedly. "Come now, introduce me to the lady!"

"Impossible," said Cohusac harshly. "She's disappeared into the desert. I'm keeping these women here hoping to lure her back, because no one can tell what's likely to happen out there in the blue."

"Well," observed the Englishman thoughtfully, "just the same, it was a great victory."

"Somehow," murmured Cohusac forlornly, "I feel rather licked!"

Baron Trenck

Another of the Goodly Company of Adventurers

By

POST SARGENT

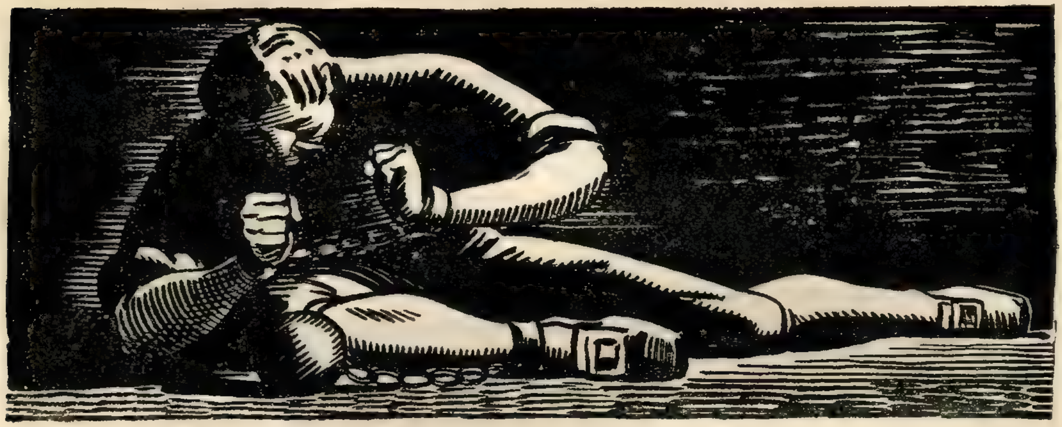
MAY God, who has hitherto permitted me amidst a thousand perils to act the part of an honest man, support and strengthen me in the last scene of my tragedy, and let not my powers fail when I meet with obstacles.

Thus Frederick, Baron Trenck, in his last written words.

And such must have been his last thought as he knelt before the scaffold-block of Paris upon a July day of 1794 and waited for the knife of the guillotine to fall. A block still warm and wet with the blood of the poet genius, André Chénier, whose soul preceded Trenck's only by the flight of a few seconds. Around the scaffold a sea of faces—avid, relentless, horrible. For the French Revolution had entered a violent phase, and the Reign of Terror was taking hourly toll of the lives of those whose faith was thought too flaccid.

Knight errant or knave erring? Decide, sirs, since for my part I may not hold with his enemies or the overly devout who have given him a name for lawless spirit, though kings, emperors and learned men have given him their friendship. For I deem him a brave if rash soldier of fortune, caught in the web of adventures and intrigues of his age, and playing the part of valiant fly against spider craft.

His offense that brought him that day to the guillotine in the company of Chénier and thirty-seven other men of note? The same crime that those commit whom a restless spirit and insatiable thirst to see, drive to the stage of stirring scenes or to the far and silent places of earth. But through his blood-filmed spectacles Robespierre was just then seeing "foreign spies" in every stranger, and marked Trenck down for slaughter.



Any other ending would have been an absurd anticlimax to this life of adventure, for Frederick Trenck had earned by hair-raising exploits the right to mark indelibly on the pages of romance his exit in heroic style.

AT THE age of eighteen he was noted for his intelligence, bravery and physical strength, as well as for his impulsiveness; an officer in the bodyguard of Frederick the Great, and high in the favor of that famous ruler. But this very favor brought him lifelong enemies who fastened on each youthful act of exuberance to bring about his ruin. And with the presumption of youth, the handsome lad aspired to the hand of Princess Amelia, sister of the king. This was the chief cause of his disgrace, since such aspirations savored of insult to royalty.

War having broken out in this year 1744 between Austria and Prussia, young Frederick Trenck played into the hands of his enemies. As a chivalrous act, his famous Austrian cousin, Colonel Francis Trenck, returned to his young relative the latter's horses captured in battle. Frederick the Great looked on this courtesy with coldness and suspicion. Of this Trenck's court enemies took advantage. They forged a letter from the Austrian cousin and had it conveyed to Frederick Trenck, who read and displayed it laughingly, and thought no more about it. Purloined by night, it reached the eyes of the grim Prussian ruler. Before the next dawn Trenck was on his way under guard to the castle of Glatz.

He remained five months in confinement, writing a trifle too haughtily to the king, demanding a military trial, asking to be confronted with his detractors, proving in a dozen ways his innocence. But Frederick the Great made no reply.

Peace was finally declared between the warring countries. Trenck's post of honor in the guards was given to another —his chief enemy. Seeing no hope of justice, realizing that he was to be left to rot, nameless and forgotten in a state dungeon, the lad determined to escape by some means. By this impetuous act he became doubly outlawed, naïvely playing the game of his foes. From this moment dates his career as adventurer and soldier of fortune.

His first attempt at escape was a failure. Laying his plans more carefully, he made a second essay.

"My imprisonment now became intolerable. Eight days had not elapsed since my last fruitless attempt to escape when an event happened which would appear incredible were I, the principal actor in the scene, not alive to attest its truth, and might not all Glatz and the Prussian garrison be produced as eye and ear-witness. This incident will prove that adventurous and even rash daring will render the most improbable undertakings possible, and that desperate attempts may often make a general more fortunate and famous than the wisest and best concerted plans."

Major Doo, the commandant of the castle, visited the prisoner to reproach him bitterly for his action of the week before. His tone and words grew insulting, more so than the spirited youth could stand. His reply was more dramatic than mere words.

"At that instant I snatched his sword from his side, on which my eyes had been some time fixed, sprang out of the door, tumbled the sentinel from the top to the bottom of the stairs, passed the men who happened to be drawn up before the prison door to relieve the guard, attacked them sword in hand, threw them suddenly into surprize by the manner in which I laid about me, wounded four of them, made way through the rest, sprang over the breastwork of the ramparts and, with the sword drawn in my hand, immediately leaped this astonishing height without receiving the least injury.

"A sentinel, however, in a narrow passage endeavored to oppose my flight, but I parried his fixed bayonet and wounded him in the face."

Escape almost in sight—the fugitive's foot became wedged in the palisade and he was captured after a furious struggle. Beaten and wounded by the butt ends of the soldiers' muskets, the youth was returned to his cell and the severities of imprisonment were increased.

A new attempt at escape was betrayed by a fellow-prisoner.

"Now was I exposed to all the storms of ill fortune; a prosecution was entered against me as a conspirator, who wanted to corrupt the officers and soldiers of the King. They commanded me to name the remaining conspirators; but to these questions I made no answer except by steadfastly declaring that I was an innocent prisoner, an officer unjustly broken, because I had never been brought to trial—that consequently I was released from all my engagements."

But few could resist Trenck's winning personality. With the exception of Major Doo, officers and men of the garrison were his devoted friends. By their connivance he finally made his escape, carrying on his back a wounded comrade. Despite alarm guns to arouse the country, despite search parties that scoured the highways and hills, his herculean strength, his brazen indifference to danger, his mind fertile in expedients, brought the two fugitives to Branau in Bohemia, where they were for the moment safe.

How record in this brief account the series of remarkable adventures of this bold youth during the succeeding months? Adventures as extraordinary as they are well authenticated. Pursued by the active vengeance of Frederick II, he wandered about miserably, obliged sometimes to resist sword in hand the agents sent in pursuit of him. Proscribed in his own country, he took service with Austria. Finding himself at length in Danzig, he was delivered up to the Prussian king by the treachery of the city authorities. He was then taken to Magdeburg and imprisoned in the citadel.*

In a tiny cell almost without light, inclosed by walls seven feet thick that shut out the sight of sky and earth, Baron Trenck was made for many months to suffer the tortures of hunger and thirst.

"It is impossible for me to describe the pangs that during eleven months I endured from ravenous hunger. I could easily have devoured six pounds of bread every day; and every twenty-four hours, after having received and swallowed my small portion I continued as hungry as before I began, yet I was obliged to wait another twenty-four hours for a new morsel. God preserve every honest man from sufferings like mine! My hunger increased every day, and of all the trials of fortitude my whole life has afforded, this eleven months was the most bitter."

In this horrible situation Trenck set himself for two months to a careful study of his surroundings and the prison routine. He marked that invariably the pittance of food was brought at noon; that only once a week, and that on a Wednesday, did the commandant make his round of visits. He saw that where his table and stove stood the floor was bricked and that this paving extended under the wall to the neighboring cell. Finally he learned from a friendly sentinel that, could he make his way into the next cell whose doors were unlocked, it would be possible to escape from the castle and reach the river Elbe. On the farther bank, a mile away, lay Saxony and temporary safety.

With infinite labor he drew the nails from his table to serve as tools. With these he worked for six months on floor and walls. The dungeon toils of Monte Cristo were child's play compared to the efforts of Trenck to tunnel through floor and walls. One by one he loosened the bricks of the floor partially concealed beneath his table and close to the wall. Each brick he numbered, that it might be replaced properly in case of danger. The mortar was carefully gathered up and blown each night from the window through a paper tube, and only when the wind was strong enough to waft the dusty particles away.

Behind the brick covering of the wall were large hewn stones, to a depth of seven feet. A friendly soldier supplied Trenck with a bayonet and sheath knife. With these he burrowed, inch by inch, week by week, until the mortar was loosened and removed piece by piece.

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*Some forty years later that remarkable philanthropist and prison reformer, John Howard, visited "that famous place of durance, so well known as the prison-house of the chivalrous Trenck; but the prisoners generally were not kept in cells of 4 feet square and 6 feet high, loaded with heavy irons, and fed on a miserable allowance of bread and water—as had been the case for six long months with the adventurous soldier whose revelations have made the name of the latter fortress a word of terror to all Europe."

Finally the great task was completed. The loose stones and bricks were in place, and only a careful examination would have shown that the seemingly solid wall behind the table was in reality a false door to the next cell. But who in his right mind could imagine the possibility of such a feat? Not the commandant, certainly.

Meantime Frederick Trenck had considered the need of money in the event of his escape. Through the good offices of a friendly soldier two grenadiers who were among his guards were won over to his cause. A messenger was dispatched to Berlin to acquaint Trenck's sister and the Austrian ambassador with his need for money. The ambassador received the messenger most kindly and drew from him the secret of the intended escape. Part of the money was forthcoming and the rest was promised. The messenger returned to the castle of Madgebourg to carry the good news to the prisoner. On the road he was passed by a king's messenger and arrived to learn that one grenadier had been hanged and the other tortured. The ambassador had played false.

As yet, strangely enough, nothing had been discovered of Trenck's subterranean operations. So, when the news of his betrayal was brought to him he made instant preparations to fly during the night. But as he made ready that evening to remove the bricks and stones that blocked the passage to the next cell, the door of his own cell was suddenly flung open. Dazed by the glare of the torches, he was seized and bound hand and foot; a bandage was placed over his eyes, and he was dragged away to a new cell. He best describes his own feelings at the wreck of his plans:

"The bandage was taken from my eyes. The dungeon was lighted by a few torches. Great heaven! What were my emotions when I beheld the floor covered with chains, a fire pan, and two grim men standing with their smiths' hammers.

"These minions of despotism went to work at once. Enormous chains were fixed to my ankles at one end, and at the other to a ring that was fixed in the wall. This ring was three feet from the ground, and only allowed me to move about two or three feet to the right or left. They next riveted another huge iron ring of a hand's breadth round my naked body, to which hung a chain fixed into an iron bar as thick as a man's arm. This bar was two feet in length and at each end of it was a handcuff. An iron collar was added round my neck."

The smiths worked in silence and left without once having spoken. Trenck heard the horrible grating of four doors that were successively locked and bolted upon him; the faint echo of footsteps that soon died away. Then silence and the black night of the tomb.

THE cell in which Trenck was immured had been finished with lime and plaster only eleven days before, and everybody supposed it impossible for the prisoner to live there above a fortnight after breathing the damp air. Such was his strength and physical resistance, however, that he remained six months, constantly drenched with very cold water that trickled upon him from the thick stone arches above. A little light crept in through a loophole when the sun shone squarely upon that side of the fortress. Else complete darkness, and the steady drip-drip-drip of the moisture from the walls.

Loaded with chains and riveted to the wall; in utter darkness; without sufficient food; shut out from every contact except the sight daily of the guard who brought his bread and water; surrounded by walls whose six-foot thickness was proof against cannon shot. Yet Frederick, Baron Trenck glowed with the desire to convince the world that he was capable of suffering what few men had ever suffered before—and lived. And his hope lived on, emerging from beneath this load of physical and mental trials, triumphant over his enemies.

After days of effort he managed to force his right hand from its handcuff, though the blood trickled from his fingernails. Swollen and beef-raw, the left hand finally found freedom. Thereafter, upon each visit of the guard, Trenck was compelled to wrap the chain about his wrists and tie them with the ribbon of his queue. The chain that held him to the wall by the waist yielded to his giant strength and left him free to roam about his little cell.

He had, before his arrest, concealed a knife in his clothes. This had escaped the careless search of his jailers. One night, a fourth of July, when the guard had come and gone, Trenck threw off the chains and attacked the wooden doors with his knife. Each was an inch thick. He cut around the lock of the first and pushed it open. The second door was more difficult. The lock was cut out, but the door resisted. Trenck put his weight and enormous strength against it and wrenched it from its hinges. Utter darkness; the work had to be done by feeling. His huge body was bathed in sweat; his fingers were clotted in blood; his lacerated hands were incredibly swollen.

The third door finally gave way, and the fourth—but no! The knife blade snapped short, before the lock was even weakened. Trenck exerted his strength in vain. He hurled his great body a dozen times at this last barrier, but the door stood firm. Exhausted, finally, he retraced his steps over the fallen doors to his stone bed, where he fell in utter weariness and despair. And so the dim light of the following morning found him.

He had the hours until noon before the arrival of the guard. These he utilized in preparations for a last stand, being resolved to die rather than submit to further months and years of brutalizing confinement. With lacerated hands and the broken link of a chain he managed to tear loose some of the stones and bricks of the masonry. These he piled up for ammunition.

Noon came. The rattle of keys sounded at the outer door. The turnkey pushed open the door and entered. At the threshold a squad of soldiers ground arms. An oath fell from the turnkey's lips as he caught sight of the three broken doors and the prisoner who stood, besmeared with blood, a broken knife in one hand, a huge stone in the other. He started to enter the cell, but halted quickly at the hoarse command that came from the prisoner's lips.

"Stand back, you and your fellows! Tell the governor that I will no longer live in chains, and that here I stand if he pleases, to be shot, for so only will I be conquered. No man shall enter. I will destroy every one that approaches. Here are my weapons. I will live free or die in spite of tyranny!"

The sight of this blood-covered giant the fame of whose former escapes filled Europe with awe daunted turnkey and soldiers. Without daring to enter, the latter took position at the threshold with fixed bayonets. A soldier was sent to notify the commandant.

The latter came presently attended by more soldiers and some officers. The commandant entered the outer cell, but sprang back the moment he beheld the colossus standing with boulder in outstretched arm. Trenck repeated his warning. The commandant ordered six soldiers to the attack.

Since the cell was no more than two feet wide, only two soldiers could attack at one time. The first grenadier was knocked down, unconscious. The rest ran back and could not be induced by the commandant's threats to risk their lives again. Without royal order the commandant dared not give the command to use firearms against the prisoner.

A parley ensued. In the end the commandant gave his promise that Trenck, in return for his surrender, would no longer be chained in his cell. This promise was kept for three days. On the fourth the chains were restored. New doors of double thickness were set up in place of those destroyed.

To all appearances Trenck was now cut off completely from the world, a hopeless prisoner for life. Any other than this young soldier of fortune would have given way to despair and let his life ebb out quickly in the reeking atmosphere of his black dungeon. Black despair he doubtless had at times. Hope ran thin. But *will*—the kind of will that Prometheus had when chained by the olden gods to the mountain cliff—will rose superior to mere human moods. Rested, hands healed, mighty muscles recovered from their recent wracking task, Trenck considered once more the problem of his escape.

The rumor of his late attempt had reached the ears of one Gefhardt, former grenadier in the regiment of Trenck and loyal admirer of his late colonel. Gefhardt managed to have himself enrolled among the guards of this castle of Magdebourg. Cautiously, stealthily, he made his presence known to Trenck and, in the course of several months, succeeded in slipping into the latter's cell several small tools—a file or two, a chisel, a sharp knife. Still later a brace of pistols, powder, ball and a bayonet.

The months now passed without further incident. Each day, at the hour of inspection, the turnkey with his squad of soldiers would find his shackled prisoner seated in deep thought on his iron bed, fetters tight-fixed on legs and arms and waist. A nod of greeting or a melancholy smile was his sole response to the cheery word of his jailer, who had conceived a real affection for the prisoner. And sometimes the soldiers, on leaving the cell, could wag their heads wisely and say words to this effect:

"His spirit's gone. The body will soon follow."

"Aye, the crock is cracking fast, as will happen to china pitcher or common ware that approaches too near the royal well."

"A loss indeed, say I, for kingdom and army. We have few such men of brawn and brain to spare since the constant wars have carried off the flower of our old families."

But when the tumblers of the lock of the outer door were nightly heard to fall noisily, a change came over the prisoner. Trenck jumped alertly from his bed, all signs of melancholy and physical decrepitude gone. The chains and fetters, long since filed through, were soon removed, to be replaced before the guard returned, and the telltale marks filled in with blackened bread crumbs.

The floor composed of three layers of three-inch oak, the masonry, six feet in thickness, all seemed proof against anything except explosives. But Trenck went to a corner where the darkness was most intense, inserted his chisel beneath a board and drew, section after section, a two-foot square of planking from its setting. Then, addressing himself to the wall, he removed several large stones, revealing a small passage already hollowed out to the depth of five feet—a passage designed to pierce the wall and meet the main corridor of the castle close to the entrance portal. The result of six months of incessant toil.

And now, taking his chisel, he set himself for another night to the tedious task of drilling out the hard mortar that joined the stone blocks in relentless grip. Another foot; a week or two more to go. On the outside, Gefhardt had laid plans with four soldier friends to spirit Trenck away as soon as he should give the signal that the last stone was about to be removed.

But the steady *chip-chip-chip* and the *clank-clank-clank* of the chisel on the flint-like mortar sounded through the last few inches of the wall. The sentinel of the corridor had his curiosity aroused. He traced the sound to its source behind the wall, listened a moment, and then hastened to the commandant. The commandant laid a trap.

Now, by the dim light of the corridor a watcher might have seen a miracle happen. A stone moved in the seemingly solid wall. Then, where the stone had been, a space appeared, deep and black. A head appeared, followed by broad shoulders. Frederick, Baron Trenck.

The prisoner peered into the corridor.

No guard. The dark corners were apparently deserted. About to step out from his little passage in the wall, Trenck hesitated suddenly, then drew back his head with lightning speed as a musket butt crashed down past the hole in the wall. A rush of soldiery from dark corners of the gallery. But Frederick Trenck was once more back in his cell.

His attempted escape had failed. At once, with unweakened faith in his own powers and the justice of his cause, he began to plan a further trial of skill with the myrmidons of the Prussian despot.

The passage that had cost Trenck so much labor was filled up, the flooring replaced; heavier irons were substituted for those which he had broken; chains and fetters fastened him to wall and floor. Questioned as to the manner in which he had obtained his tools he answered laughingly:

"Gentlemen, Beelzebub is my best and most intimate friend. He brings me everything I desire and supplies me with light. We play all night long at piquet and, guard me ever so carefully, he will finally deliver me out of your power."

The commandant of the fortress becoming insane, a new officer was appointed in his place. The latter treated Trenck with so much kindness that the grateful prisoner pledged himself not to try to escape. Thus eighteen months went by. The new commandant being in turn replaced, Trenck considered himself justified in making another bid for liberty.

By this time the facts behind the imprisonment of the young nobleman were known over all Europe. Quite unaware of the tremendous wave of sympathy that had set in his direction, Trenck once more started mining operations within the narrow confines of his dark cell. With even greater facility than before he procured the necessary tools and set to work. An accident happened that nearly put an end to his project and his life.

He had pierced the cell walls and, working downward, was mining under the foundations of the ramparts, when a huge stone block fell down closing up the passage. He found himself buried alive. As he worked to free himself, the air of his new cell grew foul. Thirst was added to his sufferings and he was tempted to lie down and die of suffocation. His will once more triumphed, however, and he made a last desperate effort. Clawing away the sand that sealed the fallen boulder, he raised the latter bodily from its bed and managed to carry it to one side. It was later estimated that the great stone weighed over a quarter-ton.

Exhausted, he crept back to his cell in the fortress. He had hardly time to clear away the traces of his work before he received the daily visit of his jailers. After their departure he went to work again, and thereafter for many days delved and toiled to complete the passage.

False promises and betrayal! Induced by solemn promise of royal pardon to reveal the existence of his new operations, Trenck gave up the secret of this latest attempt at escape.

"After the most solemn promises of good faith, I immediately freed myself of my chains, raised up the flooring, gave them my arms and ammunition, and also two keys that my friends had procured me to the doors of the subterranean gallery. I desired them to enter this gallery and sound with their sword hilts at a place through which I could easily break through in a few minutes.

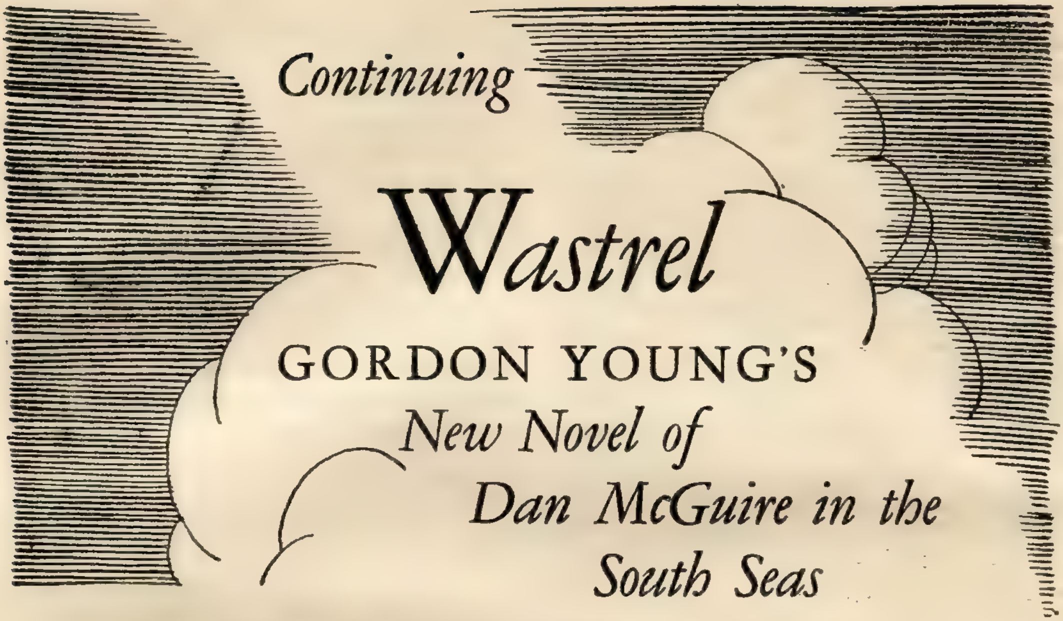
"They went, examined, returned and put questions. They left me with seeming friendship. But all their promises were trickery and lies. The guard was redoubled next day; two grenadiers entered my room as sentinels; precautions were taken throughout the whole prison, as if it were supposed that an army was to come to my aid."

Frederick, Baron Trenck was now immured for life. But public opinion that fifteen years before would have dashed itself in vain against the imperious will of a Prussian Frederick or a French Louis, now spoke. Not loudly, but insistently, with that new-growing sense of humanity and social justice. And Frederick the

Great, not less despotic than his brother-in-lawlessness, Louis XV, kept an ear closer to the ground. He heard the popular voice. He set Trenck free. Boudoir intrigue yielded to the new public conscience.

It would be a grateful task to have to record that, after nine years of imprisonment, Frederick Trenck found peace. His one escape and his many attempts at escape earned him just fame as one of the greatest of the world's adventurers. They earned him rest and happiness. But the restlessness in his heart and mind drove him on over the road of vicissitudes, until the guillotine loomed one day before his startled eyes. And then, in company with André Chénier and thirty-seven other good men and true—though weary—he did find peace and rest.

Turn about author of poetry and prose, wine-merchant, journalist, confidant of kings and high officials beyond the Prussian frontiers—his long confinement unfitted him for the monotonous life of counting-desk or armchair. As with many another soldier of fortune destined from birth to the open road, his destiny lay in splendid defeat and his victories in triumphant death.



Continuing

Wastrel

GORDON YOUNG'S

New Novel of Dan McGuire in the South Seas

DAN McGUIRE, homeless vagabond, casual loafer, had no business being interested in beautiful Reena Symonds. But Dan somehow felt sympathy for all suffering women—for black Nata, in the hut of whose husband Nick, keeper of a shanty bar on the beach, McGuire had found a sick man, vowing vengeance on some one, calling himself Wandering Jew, avenger; for gentle Mrs. Brade on the plantation where he worked, longing hopelessly for her stalwart young trader son Dave to settle down and help his father; for Mrs. Fanning, wife — so-called — of Brade's partner, who was only now beginning to realize what sort of bullying weakling this was for whom she had left her husband in the States. But for Reena Dan felt the most sympathy of all.

All Kialo knew that Reena was to marry Manuel, half-breed son of Zurdas, her father's brutal overseer. But they did not know the thing McGuire had found out from a woman of the Symonds household, who had overheard Zurdas and the planter—that Reena was not Symonds' daughter, but the child of a man Zurdas had killed so that Symonds could have the dead man's wife. The woman had died the night after she talked to McGuire—went crazy and hanged herself, Zurdas and Symonds said.

But McGuire had his own opinion of that. Zurdas and Symonds also said that Reena was insane, so that people would not believe her. For Reena knew part at least of her story, as she told McGuire. She wanted to escape. But when McGuire asked young David Brade to help her he refused. He had recently been, quite innocently, in trouble over a woman; and he believed the stories of Reena's insanity.

So did the British consul, who was a kindly man, yet could bear to see Reena married to Manuel the half-breed, thinking her insane. Yet he

"*Wastrel*," *copyright, 1927, by Gordon Young*

gave McGuire a note from her, begging him to come and see her.

CHAPTER VI

SHORTLY before dark McGuire rode up the jungle trail and stopped before the hut of Pealo, who came out with lobsided lurchings of crippled leg and greeted McGuire with a doubtful welcome. Pealo grew old with increase of bitterness, nursing an old desire for revenge and yet fearful of trying to get it.

He was a childish, greedy, pitiful yet half destestable old fellow, with a kind of manly stubbornness in holding on to his land, but nothing else of a strong character about him. Some natives, even well Christianized, with such cause for vengeance would long before have had their try at Zurdas, but Zurdas had, as was his way with most natives and other men, so thoroughly frightened Pealo that he hesitated even to try ambush.

"What you want?" asked Pealo, who in liking McGuire better than other white men did not like him very much.

McGuire replied in native speech, soothingly:

"I bring small gifts to my friend Pealo, whose tongue is not the tongue of a foolish man. You have done well to say nothing to any one of that unlucky woman you hid here among the ferns. For as I told you, if Zurdas knew he'd break more than a leg. But it takes a broken neck to make some men learn silence. All natives, except my friend Pealo, are babblers like streams at raintime!"

At the mention of gifts, Pealo came closer with eager hobbling and brightening face to look at the sack, weighted bulkily at both ends and hanging like saddle-bags of burlap across the pony's shoulders.

Then out of the hut came Pealo's daughter Taleo, a broad-shouldered lithe woman, and her husband Kirmo, a swart native, blacker than the blacks. It was as if they had sniffed the gifts. There was greediness in their cheerful welcome. Few things came to them without work or purchase, and they were like children, greatly elated by what was given though its cost be as nothing.

McGuire lifted off the sack, and with all crowding almost against his elbows, he reached deep and brought up, one at a time, various things of scant price and much value that he handed about not unlike the manner of a Santa Claus with his pack.

To a native's palate a gift in which there is no tobacco is like weak wine to a white man's taste. McGuire had brought much tobacco and tinned meats, with some bottles of soda water. The fuzzy sweetened water always made merry drinking, for the strange taste pleased and actually tickled the natives' tongues.

When everything was out of the sack their hands were full, and they smiled upon McGuire, urging him into the hut. He entered and squatted with them on his heels for a cushion, eating of canned fish and cold taro.

Their laughter was noisy. Even old Pealo, feeling his belly grow full of sharply sauced stuff, put aside his sour face. He spoke a little wistfully of the peace and fellowship that would have been on the island if all white men were like McGuire. He scolded his fat King Tuaku, now swollen with white men's meat and waddling helplessly under the eyes of the planters' missionary. Sadly remembering the once warlike days, Pealo said it were better all Kialoans had died in battle.

But his daughter and her husband laughed at him, and teasingly she said:

"Then, wicked man, you had been put in hell. White men come and Jesus love you. Ha, make you have good leg and dance in the sing-sing, up there!"

Then Taleo with sobering change of countenance asked McGuire to tell her, as a man who knew, honestly—and let him not be afraid to whisper the truth, for she would speak of it never to any one! —if this which the mishy-men said was true, and would natives who did as told feast in one endless sing-sing up there?

Or was it a lie to make natives pay money and give up land?

She asked the question earnestly, and all then in listening silence regarded him intently, as if thus in close companionship he might confide the truth; and McGuire told them the truth, saying—

"I do not know."

They regarded him broodingly for a moment, hardly longer than a moment; then the question and its answer were forgotten and they talked of trivial things with much laughter.

When Kirmo, the swart man, learned that McGuire's gifts had a string tied to them, one end of which was to lead Kirmo himself out at night and through the jungle, he made strong protest, said it was fool-work to go stumbling about the back trails in so much darkness that none could see the way. Let McGuire, he said, lie down on mats and sleep the night away like a good fellow among friends.

Pealo, whose injury excused him from even hobbling into church, made loud empty boast that but for his leg he would gladly go to show McGuire the way.

Kirmo, with many gestures, pointed out that there was a wide road which showed the way, along which a man could go alone and not be lost.

"With people on it," said McGuire. "Maybe no man would be there this night. Maybe many men. Maybe I would not be seen. Maybe I would. It is the fool-thing not to go the way I know is safe. We, Kirmo—you and I—will go down through the jungle and along the cane field. You with me because I do not know the trail."

"I do not!" said Kirmo, shaking his head and looking as sorrowful as if poisoned. "I have sickness in my belly. It came but now. And the old hurt in my foot reawakened today. Besides, it is fool-work. I will do nothing. My belly is sick." He groaned a little and rubbed at his belly.

"But for my leg!" said Pealo with all the bravery that a man may show when aware that he will not be asked to show any. "You go to kill, eh?"

"I kill? Not a flea. I've told you, one is there who knows about this Zurdas —knows all the woman knew. You let her creep between your fingers and be found by Zurdas. I thought I would get more than false words here. So be it! Then I go alone."

Kirmo, not to be persuaded, moved, groaned, rose, crossed the hut and threw himself upon his mat. His belly was very angry, he said.

The woman Taleo gazed long at McGuire. Then, unreproachfully, she said:

"You have told lies. You go to see her. It is known. You talk on the road, long time, many times. You go steal her! Ho, you tell me truth."

McGuire evaded the question and gestured contemptuously toward Kirmo, did not spare even Pealo:

"These men love Zurdas since they help him. Pealo does not whip the belly-headed Kirmo with his tongue and make him go. They sit in fear and so help Zurdas. So I go alone. In the jungle I would be blind. I go by the road and may be seen. If found by Zurdas I shall say to him, 'Ho, Kirmo and Pealo are your friends. They helped you by not helping me!' "

Taleo arose. She was broad and lithe and her woman's heart was more as a man's should have been. She said:

"I, Taleo, will take you. Him I hate. May the devil-man eat him!"

In Taleo's simple understanding the devil was a cannibal; why else did he have a big fire going and people in it?

McGuire tied the pony near the hut lest the pony, growing lonely, set out for Brade's and leave McGuire on foot far from home and already weary by his tramp to and from Symonds.

II

TALEO was bold-minded for a native. The thought of night travel had soured her husband's stomach. Alone, she would have been uneasy too. Night travel in the bush on Kialo had one blessing: there were no beasts or serpents to be dreaded, only the evil shadows, oppressive with the race-old fears of what the night held hidden.

They went over the same trail along which the Preston woman had stumbled when she fled blindly in the dawn after an agony of waiting through the night. McGuire tripped and fell, staggering this way and that. Taleo, though not very mirthful in so much darkness, said with a laugh that to take the trail at night was the same as to have drunk too much in daytime.

Almost anywhere it was easy to step aside and with few steps become entangled in a maze, and so be lost until day came.

The jungle-born Taleo knew, though hardly by sight, when the trail divided. She chose the less traveled way, since the other went to the daily-visited taro field and, with McGuire touching the hand that she held behind her, she finally led him down a gentle hillside to where there was a view of the sky.

They were at the canebrake. Twenty feet of barren border lay between the cane and jungle. Here at this border was the unceasing warfare with hoes and ploughs and harrows against the jungle's encroachments.

Planters everywhere, though not imaginative enough to realize it, found that the jungle seemed to take up the cause of its black people and crowd the whites easily off their land; and so between it and cultivated fields must always be a warlike frontier patroled by men bearing hoes.

By coming this way McGuire had saved distance and avoided meeting with any one.

He said to Taleo—

"You will wait here till I return?"

"This place?" she asked in protest.

"I can find the way from here. It's best I go on alone. You will wait?"

"I do not go with you? I am to sit here? When will you come?"

"An hour, or two. I do not know."

Wait, alone, in the lonely dark? Not without misgivings she wouldn't. When one was astir in travel there was less listening and thinking than in this idle waiting with all senses vibrant to detect fearsome things.

"No, I will not wait," she said with a slight resentment as if she had been deceived.

"All right, then you go back. Coming was the main thing. I can risk returning by the road. You're a brave girl, Taleo. I'll see you don't regret it."

She felt deserted and would not reply.

The sound of McGuire's feet on the soft ploughed earth had hardly passed beyond her hearing before Taleo turned, and now she felt the slighter sensations of fright as she hurried homeward. The way was not so far, a crooked mile or a little more, but it seemed to her that the night spirits had stretched the trail to such length that three steps scarcely did the service of one.

III

McGUIRE went forward. The way now was plain but in his walking not easy, for the ploughed ground was sliding as loose sand and hurrying made him breathless.

It was, he guessed, about nine o'clock when he came near the house. All was darkened overhead by the heavy growth, and it was slow going to pick his way among the trees and shrubs, with here and there the startling crack of dry fallen brush underfoot.

He came close to the house and saw no light. This gave him the thought that perhaps, luckily, Mr. Symonds was at cards or talking chit-chat with friends in town.

McGuire, taking his bearings, knew that Reena would be at the other side, so he went round and at once saw the glow of a light on the part of the veranda screened for her.

He approached with caution, mindful of the fact that the same light that guided him could serve equally to betray his presence to any careless loafer or passer-by. Natives, he knew, were much given to loitering in unexpected places, and the fact that he thought Mr. Symonds might be in town did not at all make him sure that Mr. Symonds, abused by his conscience, was not sitting moodily in the darkness on the veranda.

He went forward with the stealth of a thief, moving along close to the veranda, which was some feet above the ground, and so came to the screening itself.

Peering up he saw that Reena sat so motionless with an unopened book in her hand that she seemed asleep; but, watching, he detected that her eyes were only downcast, not closed.

He made a slight tapping sound, saw her look up with startled listening.

"I'm McGuire," he said softly.

She glanced toward him but could not see beyond the screen. She got up. The book, unnoticed, slipped to the floor. She crossed to the screen and looked out. There was nothing timid in her manner, and her voice was not in the least hushed as she said:

"I don't see. Where are you?"

He spoke again and straightened up.

"Oh, now I do. How much you look like I think a ghost must look! They killed Tomas!"

"I guessed as much. And you—married! They've had their way!"

"I am not married!"

"But Mr. Morris said—"

Reena interrupted quickly, but without excitement. She spoke as if merely telling what was well thought out and true:

"There was a ceremony and I was in it. That is not marriage. I have known from the time I was a child that it is easy to frighten Manuel if he thinks you are angry. I said to him, 'Call me wife if you want, but come near me and I will kill you!' I made him believe me.

"That was after I had heard his father say—he said it loudly so that I would hear—'This night you tame that wench!' Manuel begged Mr. Symonds not to let his father know. Mr. Symonds told me that. He came to me last night as I sat here alone. He told me that. He said that he was sorry, but I did not speak to him. He asked me to forgive him, but I would not answer. He said only God knew how he suffered. I would not say anything. He looked as if he was in pain, but I did not let him see that I noticed. He wanted, he tried, to say something but the words seemed to choke him. I know he feels that I should hate him. And oh, I do!"

"But what made you—the marriage?"

Reena put a forearm against the screen and put her forehead against her arm, looking down at McGuire; and with weary quietness of voice, as if it were something to be told without evasion, said:

"They think I love you and that you paid Tomas money not to tell. Mr. Zurdas swore and threatened frightfully to make me say what we talked of when we met, but I would say nothing. I just looked at him. He drew back his fist as if he meant to strike me, but Mr. Symonds cried out and caught his arm, and said, 'Not while I live will you put hand on her!' Then they almost quarreled, but Zurdas seemed so much the stronger, and oh, the way he laughed with a hind of jeering, anger as he looked at Mr. Symonds! And I just knew then why Mr. Symonds has always done whatever that big terrible man has told him to do. After that Zurdas turned on me and said, 'This day you marry Manuel or I shoot McGuire.' Then I went with them to Port Kingston."

She paused, sighed, and speaking with weariness added:

"I have thought of killing myself, but I don't want to do that. In books, I have read of how people are happy, and I wonder what it is like to be happy, and I want to know. It must be wonderful—to be happy."

McGuire, not knowing what to say, said nothing and looked steadily up toward her shadowed face.

"I hoped," Reena continued, "that you would come tonight. They have gone to town. Manuel with them. They are afraid of you, Dan. They wonder what you know and how. Mr. Symonds, too, tried to get me to say what you have told me, but I have said nothing that would let them know. I believe they *do* think I am a little crazy, and at times I almost think so too."

"There's been cause enough!"

"I have thought all day today that I shouldn't have asked you to come, but I hardly knew what I did when I wrote that letter. In town I made Mr. Morris promise, oh, promise earnestly, that he would do what I asked. Then I gave him the letter. He was angry, and tried to make me take the letter back; but I begged so hard that at last he said he would if I would promise not to try to see you again. Of course I did. I would have promised anything! But I was afraid he wouldn't, even then. I felt that I just had to see you and tell you that I was afraid, afraid for you! And I made you come here, like this! But they are gone.

"I—you wouldn't would you?" She sank down almost to her knees and so was almost face to face with him; and her voice was pleadingly low and tense as she asked, "You wouldn't would you? Dare —I didn't, truly I didn't mean to ask you! But would you— I won't live here! I want to go! I don't care where—I would rather die!"

And McGuire, blindly reckless, struck fist to palm and said:

"Then come with me, now! I don't know where we'll go or what we'll do, but come on! Can't be worse than it is!"

"You will!" Reena pressed against the screening as if to break through, and breathlessly— "Oh, will you?"

"I'll do it, yes—and let the —— make of it whatever he can!"

"Oh let me just get—"

Reena did not pause to say what it was she wanted to get, but rose and turned with haste, running into the unlighted room off the veranda. She struck a match and moved about hurriedly. The movement put out the flame. Then she lighted a lamp.

McGuire peered, watching her shadow as it moved about. He said to himself that he was being a fool; but said too that this foolhardiness was better than slinking aside and taking no risk. He wished with prayer-like sincerity that there were on the island some of the men who had been his friends in other days—men whom no menace could baffle, and to whom, face to face, the fierce bullying of Zurdas would have been as nothing. But they were gone, some dead, some had vanished and none knew where or was ever to know.

The best left to him now were such as Grimes, and the thought of it was bitter. Foul drunken vicious old rascal, utterly shameless and half joyous.

"At his age!"

McGuire muttered oaths in protest.

IV

SUDDENLY he turned and listened. There was a sound; there were other sounds. He ducked low, listening, and became aware that stealthy feet were moving somewhere in the darkness and not far off. He dared not call out to Reena or remain. Crouching low, he began to move away cautiously, with his face turned back to see who might come into the glow of the veranda light.

Then near him, almost before him, a voice shouted:

"We got 'im! Here he is! Come on!"

It was Zurdas' voice, and other voices then broke out, all near, with the quick shouts of eager men that see the end of a chase at hand.

McGuire jumped one way and barely ducked past a reaching shadow; he turned, and there before him another form flashed up near the screen; then he bolted outward toward the darkness, but tripped as a blind man would have. With a rolling scramble he got to his knees and was rising to leap away again when down he went, beaten over head and shoulders by a whip's butt, and being down was cursed and kicked.

"You'll kill 'im!"

Zurdas answered—

"I mean to, —— his soul!"

V

WHEN McGuire's senses stirred again he thought himself coming out of a dream, a bad one; this sensation was brief and passed at once.

He lay on a floor and there seemed to be many people about. They were near the center of the room, by a table where a lamp burned. The aching of blows that had made him unconscious now seemed to clear his head. He was full of pain, and with haze-like dimness of thought remembered what had happened; and here he was lying on the floor, by a wall, like something useless and cast aside. He lay quietly, trying to clear his head. His mouth was salty with blood; his head throbbed; there was pain in many parts of his body.

"They think I'm dead," he said, and felt he must not let them know he lived, and so tried to keep still though his hands twitched to rub at bruises.

He soon detected that they knew he was not dead, for he heard Zurdas saying:

"Get it out of him, then shut his mouth. I'll break his head an' say he tried to bolt. There's none will care, the —— beach-rat!"

It was a threat of murder, but Zurdas said it almost cheerfully. He was brutal when sober, and was now thoroughly warmed with whisky. It was his voice, loud, with rapid jerky speech, that had made McGuire at first think many people were talking.

McGuire peered furtively, trying not to let them perceive that he was yet conscious. With surprize he realized that only Symonds was with Zurdas. Zurdas seemed to tower more than ever, as if he had somehow grown. His hat brim was pushed up and the hat sat far back on his head. His shirt-sleeves were rolled high, and he restlessly drew the whip through his hand, flicked it at the table's edge and at his own boot tops. Though he was angry he had an air of brutal satisfaction.

Mr. Symonds said something in a low voice. McGuire could not overhear the words but the voice trembled, and he guessed at just about what had been said from the way Zurdas answered:

"That's your way, an' has always been! You think yourself a better man than me because you say, 'Don't do that, Zurdas!' an' 'Don't do this, Zurdas!' though you know —— well I will! It's helped you as much as me. You always say, 'Don't do that!' but you're glad I do. Now aren't you? Tell the truth! Of course you are. I do what I think best. An' it's been best, too, hasn't it?"

Zurdas laughed hoarsely, with contempt.

Mr. Symonds spoke again, again so low that what he said could not be overheard except when his tone rose in vibrant protest on the one word, "murder."

Zurdas answered with truculent earnestness:

"Any man, even the best, is no more than a rat, a two-legged rat. So what of it? All you get in this world is what you take in your two hands—most of it what you take from some other fellow's hands. These good people—that's just their game. They play it one way. I play it mine. Do you think Cullum an' them that preach b'lieve what they say? What's that? Huh, you're not the only one that thinks things over. I do it too. But thinking makes you scared. Me, it makes me see it's all been right, for look what it's got us, eh? We're the richest men on Kialo!"

"And," said Mr. Symonds, "the unluckiest!"

"How so?" There was honest surprize and inquiry in Zurdas' voice.

"We have no ease," said Mr. Symonds nervously. "Are always on the watch, and wonder what is coming next. I've long been tired of it. Let us sell out and go. That would be best."

"Ho, go where? You'd feel the same wherever you were, for that's your way, an' gettin' worse. This island suits me. Suit me better when that —— beach-rat's mouth is shut up tight, but first by —— he tells me what he knows, an' how he learned it."

At that moment Manuel came into the room, and Zurdas, turning, said:

"Take a look, son, an' see if he's come to life. An' what's she doing now?"

Manuel, with a kind of giggle and grin, answered:

"Nothing, the way she always does. I watched through the screen. She just sits and looks at nothing—like this!"

To show what he meant Manuel thrust out his neck, dropped his jaw, and fixed his eyes in a blank stare, mocking Reena's misery; then he laughed. His laughter was silly, but Zurdas grinned, amused, and said:

"Bill keepin' watch, is he? She was packin' to go. Might try it anyhow."

"He's squatting right beside the door!" said Manuel gleefully.

"All right, son. Go kick McGuire to life. We'll make him talk!"

As Manuel turned away Mr. Symonds, with uneasiness, said:

"But Zurdas, not before Manuel you won't—won't question him?"

"Why not?" asked Zurdas, with a slightly drunken amusement at Mr. Symonds' uneasiness.

"And have Manuel learn? At least learn enough to guess!"

"Learn what? There's nothing to learn! I've seen to that, all these years! Liars can guess what they please. Why you yourself I'd call a liar an' face down! Not even you could prove a thing. It can't be done, I tell you!"

Mr. Symonds under the gloss of a gentlemanly calm had always been sensitively uneasy with his guilt, increasingly miserable from the wrong to Reena, who by her forbidding sullenness prevented him from doing any kindnesses that might have eased his conscience; and of late, fearing that his guilt was on the verge of being made known to all men, he had more and more succumbed to an oppressive feeling that punishment, so deserved, must and would somehow come; and in a strange low voice he now said:

"Don't be so sure. There is a God!"

The words had simply broken out from among the thoughts of his secret brooding; he himself hardly knew they were coming until they were said.

Zurdas made loud scornful sounds with laughter in them and half angered oaths; then:

"Yo-ho ho-ho-ho! Ho-ho! You've grown pious all these years! I more of a devil! We've both grown rich. So what do you think He cares?"

Mr. Symonds, overwrought with dread and worry, answered in a low tone:

"He cares, Zurdas! You'll see! He does care!"

The answer Zurdas gave with deep-throated contempt was obscene and blasphemous, scornful of men and God.

VI

MANUEL, having peered at McGuire, and shaken and kicked him, called out with petulant shrillness, "He acts dead!" then swore abusively. His thin voice made one think of a wretched woman's curses.

Mr. Symonds, whose nerves were jangled anyhow, looked toward him with a nervous staring, and what had been merely a long concealed dislike became suddenly utter detestation, strong with the wish that something evil would fall upon him. It was on behalf of this dull gibbering boy that Zurdas of late had played such a high-handed game. But for him, Reena might have been sent off the island, might have been taken away by Mr. Symonds himself, and in some far city, with kindnesses toward her he might have eased his own conscience and have gained from her at least a certain liking that would have seemed to him almost forgiveness—though he did not believe she knew the wrong he had done her. That she seemed from childhood, babyhood in fact, to have sensed it, had made Mr. Symonds very unhappy and discontented with increasing wealth. He had, in his ineffectual way, all along planned that before the time for the marriage really came he would somehow evade Zurdas' demand; though had he been honest with himself he would have known that he could never evade Zurdas. McGuire's meddling had caused Zurdas unexpectedly to require that the marriage be made at once, and so it was, for over Symonds Zurdas always had his way.

"He acts dead!" Manuel had called to his father.

"Acts is the word!" said Zurdas. "I'll bring 'im out of it!"

His heavy steps then made the floor shake; and saying, "Stand aside, son—I'll wake 'im up!" he pushed Manuel away. Then the flickering tip of the riding whip bit at McGuire's legs; and McGuire, trying not to wince, felt the whip sting more deeply, now on one spot, now on another. Thus he seemed quickly to come to life.

Manuel, who got pleasure in watching any kind of torture, laughed as McGuire squirmed. His laughter was thin and even when not loud, shrill. His pleasure in this kind of thing pleased Zurdas, had always pleased him, for Zurdas detested weak, squeamish, cowardly men.

"Set up here, you!" said Zurdas, angry but jeering. "Set up here an' lie to me! You'll try it, I know. But if you do—"

The whip fell with the weight of Zurdas' arm behind it and cut blood out of McGuire's shoulder.

"—that's what I'll do to you! Beat you to death, you ——!"

McGuire tried to sit up, but dizziness came with the movement. His head swayed and his hands groped about the floor.

Manuel cackled. It was funny. Even Zurdas under his overlapping mustache grinned at the sight of McGuire's helplessness.

"Let's give him a drink," said Mr. Symonds. "He's in a bad way."

"Wait till he gets what else is coming to 'im " said Zurdas.

"Whisky," McGuire said. His mouth was thick. "Whisky," he repeated, trying to say it loudly.

"This—" Zurdas dangled the whip before his face—"has more of a bite than whisky. Up with you or I'll—"

Now whether McGuire was really weak or whether he risked a beating to play weak there was no way of telling, but he fell over and lay as if half dead. To whip an unconscious man was waste of effort; as well flog a dummy. Besides, Zurdas wanted McGuire to talk. After that would be the time to flay him.

Zurdas stooped, roughly raised McGuire into a sitting posture, shook him; and McGuire, seeming half lifeless, mumbled—

"Whisky."

Zurdas picked him up, carried him near the table and about as he would have dropped a sack, dropped him into a chair. McGuire sat up, but dizzily. On the table was a lamp. The light made him blink. He rubbed his hands before his face; and Manuel, peering, laughed when McGuire's hands dropped, for his face was now clownishly streaked and smeared.

"Get water, Manuel," said Mr. Symonds. "Bring a basin and let him wash."

"A drink. Whisky," McGuire mumbled.

Manuel, not wanting to do as told, looked aside at his father. Zurdas, standing right at McGuire's side, glowered down, waiting for McGuire's upward glance that he might be terrified by Zurdas' look of menace.

"He looks funny!" said Manuel.

"I'll get the basin," said Mr. Symonds. "Then we'll give him a drink."

"You think," Zurdas growled, "he'll lie the less for being washed?"

"I think he's more likely to tell the truth," said Mr. Symonds, "if we fix him up so he knows what he's saying!"

There was no cruelty, at least no brutality, in Mr. Symonds; but much of the sort of weakness that did not know how to resist a ruthless scornful fellow such as Zurdas, of whom, in the secret places of his heart Mr. Symonds was a little afraid, but also toward whom, until recently, he had felt, for all the guiltiness that at times troubled his memory, a sort of indebtedness. It was not the sort of indebtedness that Mr. Symonds wholly enjoyed, though being a rich gentlemanly planter was pleasurable; but it was nevertheless indebtedness, and the more valued, or certainly the more impressive, because Zurdas was rarely generous and kept faith with but few men.

So Mr. Symonds himself brought a basin and towel.

McGuire, with returning clearness of head, continued for a time as best he could to seem dizzy, though he half expected any moment that Zurdas, in exasperated rage, would bring down the whip; but McGuire felt that whatever the risk he must gain time to think. If he gave away the truth or even a glimmer of it he was sure that his life would not be worth so much as a candle's flame in daylight. But what to say?

"Whisky," he said, dabbing the towel at his face, raw with bruises. Holding the towel down he stared at the bloodstains that came away on it. "Whisky. So I can talk. Tell things. Things you—" with upward glance toward Zurdas McGuire hesitated, then took the chance of having his head promptly battered again—"things you won't want to hear!"

"Ho! So heh!" said Zurdas with blustering shout, just a little anxious over what it might be that gave McGuire at such a time as this, when he seemed hardly able to speak at all, the rashness to make a threat. "You just try to lie to me an'—"

"I thought it was the truth you wanted," said McGuire, putting the wet towel to his aching head.

"I'll know if it's truth or not! Now stop that babyin' yourself!" With that, Zurdas jerked away the towel and flung it aside. "An' talk! You hear me!"

Up came the whip and with swirling hiss passed so close to McGuire's head that he dodged a little. Manuel laughed with a sort of cackling giggle, liking to see men afraid of his father, hoping to see McGuire flogged.

"No, Zurdas! No," said Mr. Symonds, whose nervous fingers had been plucking at his beard, and who now with great effort tried to appear calm as he lifted a hand. "Let him talk. That's what we want. Let him talk."

"He'll lie!"

"Lie," Manuel repeated. "Oh, he'll lie."

"Whisky," McGuire said, staring toward the bottle. He wanted whisky, wanted too as much delay as he could get.

Zurdas glared at him and hesitated. Zurdas was stained with Indian blood. This showed in his straight black hair, dark face, massive bony features. He was thought to have been born, and had certainly played a part, in a revolutionary blood-drenched country where life was cheaply regarded. His temper was at times uncontrollable, but there was likely to be a certain cunning, not unlike caution, in his ruthlessness, though he did have a zest for cruelty that was very like a love of torture.

"Well give him a drink," said Zurdas. "But I'll have one first!"

He reached to the far side of the table, took bottle and glass, poured to the brim, and with backward jerk of head tossed up his hand as if to throw glass and all down his throat. Then he poured another glassful, put it at the edge of the table near McGuire and said—

"Drink, you!"

McGuire's hand shook in reaching for the glass, and the trembling of his hand caused him to spill much liquor in bringing it to his mouth.

"He's scared!" said Manuel, gleeful.

McGuire's mouth was raw inside where blows had broken the flesh against his teeth; the whisky burned like fire, and the grimace of pain made him shake his head and blink.

"Another!" McGuire asked.

"No more!" Zurdas answered.

"It won't hurt," said Mr. Symonds, and filled the glass.

"Thank you," said McGuire, and this time succeeded in spilling most of the whisky into his mouth.

What could he say to make these men afraid of him, and yet afraid to kill him? The two things did not go together. Hint at Miss Preston's death, say it was guessed, talked about? That what she knew, was known? Likely he'd be brained, as she'd been strangled, then and there!

Mr. Symonds, pouring a glass of whisky for himself, said as he took it up—

"Zurdas, let me tell McGuire something first that may interest him, and—uh—show him that he isn't quite—uh—it will probably do something to make him less—uh—pleased with his meddling."

Zurdas grunted grudgingly:

"All right. But he'll be sick enough of it when I'm through with him!"

Mr. Symonds drank his whisky, coughed, patted his breast lightly; then, with fingers that trembled a little, curled up his mustache tips as best he could to show an air of coolness and, having nibbled for a moment on the tip of his unlighted cigar as he studied just how best to begin, said:

"You see, McGuire—" Mr. Symonds' grimace was intended for a calm smile—"Reena wrote that letter and gave it to Morris at our request so you would come here tonight and we could question you."

Mr. Symonds gestured expressively.

Zurdas laughed; as if he thought this joke on McGuire was good, or at least wanted McGuire to feel that he thought so, then he said:

"Yeah! We waited for you on the road, but left a man to watch the house too. He come an' told us you were here. You're smart, but we've been used to takin' care of ourselves, an' of them too that—" this with a look, meant to frighten—"make trouble for us!"

"So you see," Mr. Symonds added with air of assurance, "we know more than you think. But we want to know just what *you* think you are trying to do by, by—uh—just what has been your object in meeting Reena and in—uh—"

He uneasily suspected McGuire of suspecting certain things, but hesitated to mention his own suspicions lest it give McGuire confidence in their truth. The best way seemed to appear merely exasperated by McGuire's meddlesomeness, and not to seem to have the faintest inkling of what McGuire might possibly have guessed at; though it was vividly and uneasily, in Mr. Symonds' recollection how this fellow not long before in the Benz store had spoken of Honduras.

Zurdas impatiently made the same demand in his own direct way:

"Yes, we want to know what the—— you've been up to! Now talk!" He brought the whip down on the table, making the bottle dance and the lamp wink under the jar of the blow. "But at your first lie—*that!*" Again he struck the table. "Right across your head! Talk now! Lie to me. Lie, if you dare!"

"Lie to you?" McGuire gazed at him steadily. "Well, think this a lie if you like. You've heard of the man—" he looked from Zurdas to Symonds, sensing that Symonds was the more uneasy, the more easily frightened— "the sick man, I pulled out of Nick's shanty? Got the doctor for him. Got natives to nurse him. You've heard of him?"

"What you talkin' 'bout?" said Zurdas.

"Heard what, McGuire?" Mr. Symonds asked, mystified.

"Heard I did that? And how he talked? You haven't heard? You, Zurdas, you haven't heard?"

Symonds and Zurdas exchanged puzzled glance, and downright blankly gazed at McGuire. They had heard, for the doctor had told it as a joke, of how McGuire through talk of smallpox had scared Nick into coming into town for him. But that was all. It had been told idly at the club and laughed at. The doctor had said the poor devil was bad off with worse than whisky. Yes. There had been that phrase, "worse than whisky;" but it had meant nothing then, and recalling it now meant nothing to Mr. Symonds, who inquired:

"Well, what of him?"

"He was sick, and full of fever. Almost died."

"Well?" asked Mr. Symonds.

"Well what of it?" Zurdas demanded.

"It was how he talked—there at Nick's. You haven't heard?"

"Heard? Heard what?" said Zurdas, far more exasperated than interested.

"Feverish, he was. Aye, and how he

talked!" Then, aware that he was venturing his neck hazardously, McGuire added: "Said, 'God won't cheat me. I can't die till I find 'em!' "

Mr. Symonds, with startled quickness, asked—

"Find who?"

"Yes, who?" Zurdas asked loudly, with just the merest trace of feeling that something was about to be said that he wouldn't like, so he braced himself as if to strike in case the answer was not pleasing.

"If you don't believe me, go ask Nick how the man talked! And Nata! And ask the doctor how he was scarred with old wounds, so it was easy to believe—"

McGuire paused.

"What?" said Zurdas.

"Believe what, McGuire?"

"Believe his tale about being once years ago left for dead."

Zurdas and Symonds each looked straight at the other with widened gaze. McGuire, that they might not see he watched them, felt of his face and head as if preoccupied with his own pain.

Zurdas glanced suspiciously at McGuire, then again at Symonds, and Symonds turned his back, staring for a moment into the darkness through the window.

"Well go on, go on," said Zurdas. "I don't know what you think you're talkin' about, but go on!"

"It was how he talked. That's what interested me at first. Why, I got the doctor for him and, you know? he's well now. Almost well."

"How did he talk? What'd he say?" asked Zurdas with a bullying air of doubt that did not quite conceal a certain half-angered uneasiness. "An' see here, does Nick and that cross-eyed doctor know all this?"

McGuire evaded the last question, answering, with eyes turned to meet

" 'I can't die till I find them!' He said that. He said it many times. Was fever-struck. But told the truth. You believed him. He's searched the world over for men that thought they'd killed him, then took his wife and child and fled."

Mr. Symonds made a queer gasping sound; but Zurdas, after one moment's blankly dazed look of fright, yelled curses, "You think, do you, that he talked of us!" and towering, raised to his toes, flung up the whip, giving an overhand swing to heighten the blow, and brought it down. McGuire ducked futilely, pushing against the back of the chair, dropping his head, half raising his arms. With all his force, Zurdas struck. The blow fell, not on McGuire, but on Mr. Symonds, who pushed himself forward with arm up.

"No, Zurdas, no! This won't help! Let the fellow talk. Let him talk! He must tell all."

"Then you stand back," said Zurdas. "I'll make him talk. Where'd all this happen? You tell me that?"

"Nick's shanty," said McGuire.

"No. I mean where'd the man come from?"

"Years ago. At—"

"Where?" Mr. Symonds urged, with a hand on the table as if to support himself against an expected shock.

"Where? Yes where?" Zurdas stooped and put his face near McGuire's as if the sooner to catch the answer.

Manuel stood by with fish-like lips wide open as if he listened partly through his mouth. He, being a simpleton, did not understand what this was all about, but thought to see McGuire soon well flogged.

"Where?" Zurdas asked again, in lowered tone with a strange hint of coaxing, as if he were leading McGuire into a lie.

"Honduras," said McGuire.

The word fell and nobody made a move or sound. Manuel, who had expected his father to grow more and more angry, gaped to see Zurdas straighten up, pull at his mustache, jiggle the whip indifferently and smile; and the smile grew to a laugh, and he looked down at McGuire with what seemed to be merely contemptuous amusement.

"Honduras, eh? Symonds nor me ever saw Honduras! You are a —— of a fine meddler, you are! We're from Cuba."

Mr. Symonds shivered as if Cuban malaria were trying to help bear evidence.

He gazed abstractedly at his unlighted cigar, now broken between his fingers. He dropped the pieces and brushed his fingers, one hand against the other, not looking at what he was doing. His eyes turned here and there for some place where his glance could rest; they avoided both McGuire and Zurdas, but lighted on Manuel. He said—

"You'd better get out, Manuel."

"I'll stay," said Manuel, grinning.

Zurdas faced about.

"Get out o' here!"

Manuel, who knew his father's wild temper and had had a whipping or two—not more, though—went at once, reluctantly, with much backward staring.

Mr. Symonds took another glass of whisky, filling the glass until liquor spilled over the brim. With labored effort to appear cool, he said:

"McGuire, you will recall that I told you that I had never been in Honduras. Now just why, *why* when you heard the sick man's story did you—uh—think of—uh—us?"

"To think a thing like that of us!" Zurdas shouted, again lifting the whip. "That's what makes me so —— mad! I'll cut the flesh off your bones, you—"

"Reena's just the age the child would be by now, and—"

McGuire stopped. There seemed no way to make them know he knew they had come from Honduras without mentioning the Preston woman; and he was sure if they suspected he knew what she had learned that Zurdas would kill him at once.

"Even if that *were* true, McGuire. But Honduras—we've never been there," said Mr. Symonds, with the tone of resentment that became Kialo's one aristocrat. "Why think such a thing of me?"

"One of your men once said you'd been in Honduras. A fellow that stepped on a stick and thought it a snake. And—"

"I remember that fellow," said Zurdas hotly. "I told him we found snakes in Cuba. He got it twisted. And why, as Symonds says, would you think such a thing of us! That's what makes me so—I'll teach you to be more careful what you think!"

Zurdas raised the whip, but Symonds put out his hand restrainingly, with, "No, no Zurdas. Not yet anyhow. Now McGuire, has this—this person from Honduras—has he seen either Zurdas here or myself?"

"Don't know. It's been only the last day or two he's been able to walk. But he—"

"See here," said Mr. Symonds, "I am sure the doctor said that man—McGuire's sick man, he called him—had gone to sea with young Brade. That was several days ago."

"Yes," said McGuire, nodding slightly. "So he wanted people to think. But he didn't go. He doesn't want it known he's here—or to be seen! He knows well what he's about. And I tell you, both of you—" McGuire spoke defiantly—"Reena's father is on this island and—"

"Here, here, here," said Mr. Symonds hastily, pointing upward, indicating that the partitions of rooms within the house, for the better ventilation of air, did not go to the roof. "Not so loud! Sounds carry."

Zurdas swore, angrily and with the startled air of a man who has just thought of something:

"You've told the girl! You meant to take her tonight to that man!"

"I told her nothing," said McGuire, not wanting them to have increased distrust of her. "I wasn't sure, though the fellow himself seems sure enough! From time to time I've met her on the road, and talked with her to find out what she knew. But she was only a child and remembers nothing. So of course I didn't tell her. But this man asked if there was any way I could bring Reena to him, and let him see her. I'd said all along, none that I knew of. But when I got that letter, the one you had her write to get me here, I said to that man, 'Now—' "

"What's his name? What name does he give?" asked Mr. Symonds.

"He gives no name. Just calls himself Man. Says you fellows would run the minute you heard it!"

"Run! *Run!*" Zurdas shouted, then sneeringly, "I run from no man!"

"Anyhow," McGuire went on, "this afternoon, I said to him, 'Here's the chance. They've married her to Manuel Zurdas. She doesn't like Manuel. She'll want to run away. This letter looks like it, anyhow. I'll see if I can bring her.' And he said, 'Bring her to me! My child! My baby child! And when I've got her safe in my arms, then—then!' Aye, he said what he would do! How he knows you men are the men, I don't know. But he believes it! Are Zurdas and Symonds—" McGuire looked up inquiringly—"the names you used in—ah—Cuba!"

Zurdas and Symonds stared blankly, the one at the other. Zurdas spoke first, with curses:

"You wouldn't change your name! Just changed the spelling—said that was enough! Symonds for Simmons! You've brought this on us! He heard the name! That made him want to know what the man looked like. So he took the trouble to get a look at you! You —— fool, you!"

"But—but, Zurdas, he was dead! Dead!"

"You've found well enough he isn't!" Zurdas shouted, pointing at McGuire. Then swearing at McGuire he called him a liar, saying, "You have told that girl. We'll soon find out!" He called, "Manuel!"

At once Manuel answered and opened the door where he had no doubt been standing to listen. Zurdas said—

"Bring Reena here."

"But if she won't come?" Manuel asked with rising helpless inflection, knowing how unlikely Reena was to do what he wanted.

"Then drag her in by the hair!" Zurdas told him loudly, perhaps intending that the words should be overheard by Reena herself.

"Reena must not be abused!" said Mr. Symonds with indignation. "No! No!"

"Ho!" Zurdas jeered. "That's your talk, now is it? You think she'll tell that —— Leslie how good you've been to her, eh? Well you're in this as deep as I am. And we're in —— deep too!"

Zurdas then picked a cigar out of the tin box on the table, bit the end of it and struck a match, and turned his head to watch Mr. Symonds' back as the aristocrat, badly shaken, went without reply out of the door as if to get away from him, or perhaps merely with a kind persuasive tone to ask Reena to come. But Zurdas never lighted his cigar. He suddenly threw down cigar and match and, leaning over, glared with sudden doubt at McGuire.

"Here, see here!" Zurdas frowned, trying to think clearly, and said, "Something wrong here! You tryin' tricks on me? I remember now it was before the races you talked about Honduras to Symonds there! And that was before you'd seen this sick man you call Leslie!"

"Oh, no, it wasn't!" said McGuire.

"Oh, yes, it was!" Zurdas answered. "Because the doctor said you had your pocket full of money from the winning on Fanning's horse and wanted to pay him for that sick man's care! Here now, —— you, there's a lie somewhere! You knew about us, did you?" Zurdas seized McGuire's shoulder, stooped low. "Did you know that Preston woman? Did you put her up to spy on me? By ——! Did you ever talk with her? Did you talk with her? Did you?"

"You mean that crazy woman that hung herself?" McGuire inquired mildly.

"Yes, she hung herself!" said Zurdas with such a tone as if somebody had expressed doubt. "And you, did you put her up to listen an' overhear what—"

There was a clatter of running feet. The door that hung ajar was flung wide. Manuel, with eyes popping and whites shining, came first; close behind him Mr. Symonds, then the native Bill who had been put at Reena's door to make sure she stayed in her room. All made the cry, "She's gone!" and Manuel added, "Cut the screen!"

"Gone!" Zurdas shouted.

"We called," said Manuel, "then we looked and found she'd—"

Zurdas struck them from his way and ran with heavy-footed stride to see for himself, not because he did not believe, but because he wanted to see. Manuel and the native Bill turned and followed, each talking loudly; Manuel in a high, anxious whine, the native protesting with frightened repetition that he had not moved from beside the door, staying there as told.

Mr. Symonds started to follow also, but stopped, turned about and came to McGuire. He bent forward, peered earnestly, and with a kind of broken-voiced pleading:

"Does Reena know? Does she know I'm not—not—does she know I'm not her father?"

"Aye, she does! I'll tell *you* the truth! Has known it from the time she was a child. Her dying mother told her so. And she's remembered that!"

Just as a man when stabbed, Mr. Symonds drew in his breath with sudden gasp, put a hand to his throat, seemed about to stagger and fall. He swallowed hard, chokingly; his throat was dry, and a lump there made him gasp. Slowly, as he nodded, in a half dazed tone he said:

"I've thought—there've been times when I *knew* she did. I've told Zurdas so! He laughed. He laughs! It is his way. But now—now! Poor little Reena. It has been hell for me, for me too! And her father, McGuire? Her father—Leslie? He is here?"

Lying, McGuire nodded, slowly, convincingly; and looked at Symonds with some pity but more hopefulness. Zurdas was too hard and stubborn to confess anything; but Mr. Symonds, broken by guilt, tormented by a conscience that hurt him deeply for the wrong he had done, might possibly be got somehow to make admissions in the presence of some such man as Consul Morris, particularly while he feared thst Reena's father was alive and here on Kialo.

McGuire was very much aware of how flimsy a web he had put together. As a bit of hasty weaving to save his neck from being squeezed, it had been fairly well done, but Zurdas already had got suspicious. And just as soon as he began to make inquiries he would discover, whatever his mystification, that McGuire had fooled him with out-and-out lies; and it was very plain that he would come with a close guess to the truth in suspecting that McGuire had somehow been in touch with the Preston woman. What Zurdas had done to be rid of her showed how readily he would do something of the same kind to silence McGuire himself. That he and Symonds both had made here in this room what amounted to confession really meant nothing; for who would believe McGuire against the word of planters?

Zurdas' voice, loud in anger, could be heard telling the native to run to the quarters and turn out every man; again, as once before, they must scour the grounds, the roads, the jungles, to find, he said, a crazy woman!

Then Zurdas came back into the room, striding heavily, jarring the floor, with Manuel at his heels. Manuel, gesturing, shrieked at McGuire, putting all the blame on him. Zurdas' face was black with a scowl that meant violence without waste of words. With hunch-shouldered rush he came at McGuire, seized him, jerked him from the chair, held him at arm's length and flung up the whip.

"Where is she? Where'd she go! You meant to take her. Now by ——, quick and the truth!"

Manuel edged round to the other side of his father for the better view, and grinned in gleeful hate. McGuire, with sudden rashness and a flurry of gestures as if speaking in outrage, pointed at Manuel and cried:

"Ask him, I tell you! He's lied to you in other ways, and helped her when he could! Told her the things she has told me—which is how I know them!"

Manuel's mouth popped open and stayed open. The charge was too astonishing to be even denied, and his slow-witted head had hardly the faintest notion of what McGuire could mean.

Zurdas, wrathful and puzzled, asked:

"What 'd you mean? You crazy?"

"Mean? Mean! With him out there to watch her—you think she could have gone unless he knew! He's done what she wanted in other ways! He's only played at being a husband to fool you! Ask Symonds here. He'll tell you! Manuel's begged him not to let *you* know! Think Reena would have married him—" McGuire's out-thrust hand almost touched Manuel's face— "but that he agreed—"

In three words more even Manuel's dull brain saw that McGuire was pushing him into the full blaze of his father's anger, and shrinking back he shrieked—

"It is a lie—a lie. I did—"

Zurdas twisted about, eying his son; and McGuire, quicker than thought could form the words, cried:

"You're right you lie! Ask Symonds there!"

Zurdas brutally demanded of his son:

"You didn't tame that wench last night!"

"I did! I did! I did! Ask him there!" Manuel in beseeching terror pointed toward Mr. Symonds.

Then Zurdas turned his face and looked toward Symonds, saying nothing, but in black-browed silence demanding what this meant and what was true?

Mr. Symonds, even himself a little uneasy when Zurdas was so explosively full of anger, tugged at one end then the other of his mustache. With a kind of startled admiration he saw what McGuire was up to, and his own detestation of Manuel was enough to wish McGuire success. As calmly as he could, Mr. Symonds nodded, though really half expecting that in a rage Zurdas would strike him too, and said:

"I wouldn't have told you, Zurdas, but this night there must be nothing but the truth! Manuel did respect the wishes of—"

Manuel, damned by the power of a phrase, howled in protest and blurted truth which made it worse for him:

"*Respect!*" he shrieked. "It wasn't that! She's said she'd *kill* me! An' she would 've! I—I—that's why I didn't! I—she said—"

Zurdas broke in upon this frantic whining with full-throated curses. In brutal words he said that if this whelp had broken the girl's spirit like a proper man she would not have bolted.

"You swore you would, and swore this morning that you did! Afraid! *Afraid!* Your own mouth says 'afraid!' You lying coward, you—afraid! No son of mine, you ——!"

Zurdas, with a push, as if discarding him, turned loose McGuire, and facing his son followed step by step as Manuel in a shrinking crouch backed away with hands up pleadingly. Even then Zurdas, for all of his curses, seemed reluctant to strike, but anger fermented within him and this abject whimpering at last so worked on his contempt that suddenly he struck with overhand blow of the whip, and having struck beat his son as he would have beaten a black; and with growing rage beat him the more that Manuel fell to the floor, writhing, kicking, screaming.

Zurdas stopped and stood looking down with glaring contempt. He breathed hard from exertion and the pain of hating his own son. With a frightful curse, which were, he said, the last words he would ever speak to him, he told Manuel to get up, away, off the plantation, and never be seen again!

Then Zurdas turned and started as if blindly for the door. He was drunken with rage, almost drunkenly dizzy, that his son should be the sniveling coward—a thing long known to all men, but never before realized by the father, as blind in fondness as in his hate.

But near the door Zurdas turned, and with a quick movement drew a revolver.

McGuire, already standing, put both hands to the table, meaning to tip it, lamp and all, and so put the room into blackness—or else set all afire. But Mr. Symonds hastily stepped forward, and with hand half raised in hurried protest said:

"No! No, Zurdas! Not that!"

These things did not seem to reach Zurdas' consciousness. Had he been intending what they thought, no words or gestures would have stopped him. As if McGuire had not moved or Symonds spoken, Zurdas turned the revolver about in his hand, and thrust it out, butt-first to Symonds:

"Take this! Keep him here. We'll find that girl. She can't be far—has, of course, set out for town! I'll get 'er. Then with the two of 'em here together, we'll thresh this out. There's some way out. There's always a way out! You—" he glared at McGuire— "I smell lies in this somewhere. An' when I find 'em— And you—" this to Symonds, and even more angrily—"when this thing's straightened out, we have a settlement! I've been a —— fool to carry you all these years on my back, holding you up among men higher than myself. You, they've looked up to you, up because you were on my back! I'm done with that!"

Then he turned and, driving his heels at the floor as he walked, went from the room. Curses and broken phrases of anger drifted back to them.

They stood, McGuire and Symonds, almost shoulder to shoulder, rigidly, listening to the tramp of his feet through the house, along the veranda, on the steps.

McGuire was tempted to bolt from the room and try again to escape into the darkness, but his legs and back and head were bruised and full of pain; and he was sure that if he were re-caught, Zurdas, this time, would kill him.

VII

McGUIRE from the corners of his eyes looked at Mr. Symonds, who had turned and, with much the expression of a blind man, groped for the chair's back, and reaching it, supported himself. His face was downcast. He breathed heavily. Repeatedly he shook his head and said, "Uh, uh, uh," like a man in pain who tries not to cry out. He held the gun absently at his side.

McGuire poured whisky.

"Here," he said, holding out the glass, "we both need some of this. That devil left behind him about as much of a threat for you as for me. And after what we've seen him do—" with jerk of head and glance, he indicated Manuel, still on the floor, moaning and whimpering, pawing at himself, one place and another, to ease the burn of welts— "Zurdas would do more to any other man. He loves that thing, or did! Here's a drink!"

Mr. Symonds looked toward Manuel and shuddered; then, reaching out, he took the glass of whisky, drank with a gulp, and held out the glass, returning it.

"More?" McGuire asked.

"Not now. Not now, McGuire. Thank you."

Mr. Symonds looked at the revolver, much as if wondering for a moment how it had come to his hand, then placed it on the table and the next minute pushed it aside.

There it lay, disregarded by Mr. Symonds who turned and looked toward Manuel as he staggered, blundering, whimpering, out of the room. McGuire, with a quick arm's reach, could have secured the gun. He thought of that, then let it lie. To snatch at the gun would be a poor way to get Mr. Symonds' confidence.

McGuire was weary and glad to sit; his very marrowbones ached, his neck was kinked with pain, and deep breathing hurt his ribs as if they had been broken; but much whisky helped to dull the sharpness of his bruises—that and excited thoughts. He knew, or at least was confident enough to wait, that Mr. Symonds would presently ask if Reena had indeed gone to that ghostly figure McGuire had fabricated out of Honduras. This night that figure served well enough as a ghost; tomorrow, direct inquiry would very soon disclose that the man, whom natives had rowed to Brade's schooner shortly before its sailing, had not returned ashore, was not on Kialo.

McGuire heard the men who had been roused from their quarters running and stumbling by the house. The glitter of lanterns showed through the windows. There were grumbling curses too from the exasperated men. It was too much that two women, so nearly in the same way, should have seemed to go crazy and flee this house. Night-searching was weary work and futile. Quite superstitiously, some men sensed, and loudly complained that something was wrong. Through the window a loud voice had been heard—"What'd they do to women that makes 'em—" Figures with the indolence of men who believed the effort useless for a time groped about the grounds as if they would not go afar in their searching. A man or two, resentful at having been stirred out of weary sleep, came on the veranda, calling to know why these two men within the house did not also get out and search; and one impudent fellow, with face pressed close against the window screen, called out to McGuire:

"Ain't they killed you yet? I'm losin' my respect for Zurdas!"

Zurdas had galloped by the house, taking the road toward town. If he thought of the matter clearly he could hardly hope to find her; but meant, whatever the effort, to keep her from reaching Port Kingston. If she were on the road, hearing the horses, men's tramp and voices, she could draw aside into the shadows and be unseen. However it would be an advantage to have the searchers widely scattered abroad when daylight came.

At last there was no more winking of lanterns seen through the windows and the sound of feet and voices had passed; and there was silence except for the nervous pacing to and fro of Mr. Symonds, though his steps were almost noiseless on the mats. His fingers squirmed together, plucked at his beard, and now he would press a hand to his throat, now both hands for a moment against his eyes; once he stumbled and almost fell and twice he stopped and leaned heavily against the table as if to keep from falling; and he did not so much as glance toward McGuire until he said:

"Where has she gone, McGuire! To—to *him?*"

"You see how far wrong you men guessed in trying to guess why I met her!" said McGuire.

"But McGuire—" Mr. Symonds gazed at him sadly, without suspicion, though he said, "But McGuire, you told Zurdas you had not told her? How *could* she go to him?"

"Word 'father' has meant nothing to her. Why should I use it? She mightn't have believed me. But to say, 'Reena, there's a man here on the island who knows all about Zurdas and Symonds. Was in Honduras. Knows what happened there. Tonight he's going up to have a talk with Consul Morris, so—' "

"Stop! Stop! Oh stop!" said Mr. Symonds, and there came into his eyes the look of a man who sees himself falling into dust before the feet of those among whom he has been an equal. As if to shut out the sight he again pressed hands to eyes and turned away.

For a time he paced about nervously, then in weariness and with a miserable crumpled aspect, he, who had walked before everybody as an aristocrat, always calm, erect, wearing laundered whites and polish on his boots, sat at the edge of the table with head bowed and fretfully rubbed his fingers, one after the other, much as if to rub away numbness.

"If you think we can get by Zurdas and his men," said McGuire, "I'll take you in to Morris. Let you talk—"

Mr. Symonds at the very thought of it; he gave a startled jump and there was a moment's trace of wildness in his glance. That was about the last thing in the world that Mr. Symonds would willingly do.

McGuire, not in the least pardoning the things he knew had been done or other things suspected, did however feel how this man suffered; and though deservedly, yet McGuire was a little sorry for him. But this was no time for mercy:

"Kialo wouldn't give so much of a —— about what happened in Honduras but for the way you've treated Reena here. Pretending to be her father. Making her marry Manuel. A girl like that—and he's an idiot!"

With abject humbleness, Mr. Symonds agreed, saying:

"I know. I know. That's right,

McGuire." Then with faint hopefulness, "Things had gone so far, I couldn't help it—yesterday. But if she had only let me, I would have been as a father. I have loved Reena, McGuire. I really have. Her father was *not* a fine man, McGuire!"

"No? You'd hardly admit you killed a fine man, would you?"

"I didn't do it! Before God it wasn't I that— But he wasn't killed since he is here! After all these years! Zurdas did it. What does he look like, McGuire?"

"What 'd you expect a man to look like after nearly twenty years of hate an' fever? He doesn't look fat and well fed, I can tell you that."

"McGuire, I've dreaded this—this night, tomorrow and the next day!"

"You mean having people know?"

"Yes. Yes. I don't think I ever really expected it, but I have dreaded the thought. McGuire—" Mr. Symonds stared, almost imploringly—"there can be no mistake about it? You are sure?"

"I'll take you to 'im. You can judge for yourself!"

"No, no—no!" Mr. Symonds shivered as if chilled, though sweat came out on his forehead. Then, passionately, not swearing, but praying, "God damn the soul of Zurdas to everlasting hell! I saved him from a firing squad and got his gratitude! Reena? Reena! I am glad she's gone, even—yes, even to him! McGuire?"

"Yes?"

"McGuire, will you tell her, will you try to make her understand that I—I am sorry—I loved her—I wanted her to—you will, McGuire?"

"From now on, I think I keep pretty far away from her. Wrote a letter, getting me here, so you people could grab me!" McGuire said it, not at all believing it, but wanting to hear the reply.

"Just one more of our lies, McGuire. You must not blame the poor child. And McGuire, I thought you had made her love you. That was why—why I gave in to Manuel. We were afraid of you! I've felt for a long time, that you knew something about Honduras. Just how did you come to suspect it, first? That man wasn't here—was he?—when you first mentioned Honduras that day in the store?"

"He wasn't?" McGuire asked boldly. "And don't you suppose I wanted to be sure before I believed him? What easier than to get that Preston woman to listen to you men talk?"

"My God, *you*—McGuire! Did you, *you* put her up to that?"

McGuire might fear Zurdas' violence, but had no fear of Symond's.

"You people wiped her out, too. Clever at that sort of thing. The same with Tomas! But before I came in here tonight, I left my story with people who'll know what to think if I don't come back. How did you know I was coming?"

"When did Morris first learn about—about her father, McGuire?"

"I haven't told him. He tries his best not to believe anything I tell him. I almost did, though, when I saw him today; but I said to myself, 'He'll learn it soon enough and be the more convinced if I've not said a word.' We've had to play this thing carefully, you know! If Zurdas found her father here and sick—Zurdas has a way of wiping people out. But you see yourself it's too late now. Lamont and Morris and Cullum, the American consul too, with a troop of planters ought to be out here soon, so—"

"McGuire! Did Mr. Morris suspect anything of this yesterday? He looked, looked so very—you know—as if there was something—yesterday—at that —— marriage!"

"Perhaps he did. There's been a lot of talk, Symonds. Proof? That's another thing. But now! Her father—after all these years you don't think he would run the risk of spoiling it by not being cautious, do you? But how'd you know what was in that letter?"

"She gave it to Morris, and got out of him some kind of promise on his honor that he would deliver it. He told me he had to keep his word, but said he could not be a go-between for you, McGuire. You are right in thinking he doesn't trust you. I said, 'Let me read it, then.' So I steamed it open. I read it, and would have destroyed it, but he protested. He said he had promised to give it to you. Said that since I had read it, he could with a clear conscience deliver it. So we sealed it again, and I told him to be sure to send us word the same day he gave it to you. This afternoon the message came. Tonight we waited for you. We felt we just had to learn what it was you knew and how you happened to know it. So you, you're behind all this bad luck that has come!"

"I'm behind it?" McGuire, from an eye's corner judged the distance between his own hand and the gun, and saw Symonds' fingers with what seemed half idle fumbling touch it. McGuire leaned forward, elbow to arm of the chair; and repeated, "I'm behind it?" then said, "You think God's blind? Or that He forgets? You haven't hid it well enough to fool men—how then fool Him!"

Mr. Symonds lowered his head a little, nodding, and his eyes were fixed on the floor, but his fingers took up the gun and holding it in front of him he turned it over and over nervously in both his hands, now holding the muzzle, now the butt, now letting it dangle with a forefinger through the trigger-guard.

"McGuire, has Leslie told you the whole story?"

McGuire said:

"He doesn't tell much, Symonds. It was only his being out of his head that gave a glimpse of what he'd been through. At first didn't trust even me. Well, a man like that might think that a man like I'm supposed to be would sell out to two rich planters, such as you and Zurdas."

"McGuire?" Symonds faced him and spoke breathlessly: "McGuire! There's money here!" He pointed half backward into the dimness of the room toward a chest. "Keep it on hand for blackbirders. You take it! I'll get you more! Whatever you say, McGuire! We'll pay it!"

"Too late! Too late, Symonds. Too late. You can't buy out of this. You can't dodge away. The best you can do is break away from Zurdas. Go now and tell Morris and men in town just how it was!"

"I can't—I can't do that! No! But McGuire, look at it as it happened! It wasn't so —— wrong. The whole country was fighting. Revolutions, you know. McGuire, I was the close friend of a general who set out to make himself king, and almost did. That's how I met Zurdas. He was just a common soldier, bandit rather, that was captured. My friend the general meant to shoot them; and did, all but Zurdas. It was because of his wife, a native girl, who came to me and begged that I, an American, should save her husband—American too, she said. He did speak English then as well as I. That helped, I suppose, to interest me; but the other thing was she was just a child herself, and she had the baby in her arms. That baby has become Manuel.

"We American planters there, McGuire, as little as we may have wanted to, had to take sides, or have no friends at all. And if we didn't get on the right side, we were pretty likely to lose everything—life with it.

"Leslie knew I loved his wife, McGuire. What is more, he knew that she loved me. Zurdas, on the road one day, killed him. Or so we've thought all these years. Leslie was no friend of the general who was my friend, so Zurdas said to me, 'We'll tell the general you killed Leslie. Make him think more of you. Duel, it was.' Zurdas pressed me, so I did. I did it more, McGuire, more because I didn't want Reena's mother to think I had had him murdered, so I said it was a duel. That we met, face to face, that we counted to three aloud together, both fired at once. She believed it at first, I know she did. But afterward I'm not so sure. She had a way of looking at me. I could almost feel what she thought. And Reena has been like that too.

"It seems, McGuire, that my fortune rises to a certain point, then turns and falls. So in Honduras too. My friend the general was defeated, later shot—a bandit, one the natives called *El Matador*, The Killer, rose up, swept all before him for a time. He would have no Americans, rich Spaniards either, for friends. Wanted their property. Took it, and their lives.

"Now, McGuire, I tell you this because I want to show you that I am telling you the truth and holding back nothing. When I left the country I did take money that was not mine. My friend the general had put it in my keeping. He was dead. Bandits would have got it. With me I took Reena and her mother, Zurdas, Tomas and Manuel, then a small boy, five or six. I don't know what had become of Manuel's mother. Tomas once told me she had gone with an Indian. Zurdas said she died.

"We all got to a sea port, on an English vessel. It sailed for Australia. On the way, Reena's mother died. But that strange little baby girl even then, McGuire, was afraid of Zurdas and seemed even afraid of me.

"We came here, to Kialo. Reena was then about three, perhaps not quite three. I did—I do love the child. I wanted her to think I was her father. Something in her eyes always made me feel—yes, I'll say made me feel guilty, though, God knows, what else there was to do! We said we were from Cuba because it seemed best to have what had happened on Honduras forgotten. God! I wasn't happy, but I felt safe enough until that Preston woman—ah! And it is Zurdas' way to kill, and like to kill! That's my story, McGuire."

McGuire nodded, not wholly believing everything he had said, at least not believing that it was just as he had said, and Mr. Symonds seemed to feel it, for he asked—:

"You don't believe me, McGuire?"

"What I believe has nothing to do with it."

"Yes, but it has! I want you to tell Reena the best you can of me! What the rest of the island thinks, I don't care. I'm glad that Leslie is alive. I'm glad you found him. Tonight, that saved your life; but for me, for me it has been a death sentence. There's no other way—"

He turned his back as if again to begin his restless pacing; but McGuire saw the gun fly up and jumped from the chair with hand out, crying:

"Not that! Help Reena—you'll be safe enough! That's all I want!"

But if Mr. Symonds heard, he did not understand and, with the gun's muzzle against his forehead, shot.

McGuire looked down at him, bent low over him. He was sickened by the tragedy of it. Thoughts huddled confusedly through his brain. Here was confession, complete and futile! Slain by the fear of a ghost, as most of the self-slain are. Living, he might have, could have evaded all the things he feared. He could, defying Zurdas instead of thus defying God, have even shown his better side to Reena, and at last have sheltered her. Guilt, as surely as any that ever drew the hangman's knot against a felon's throat, had taken his life. McGuire heard steps behind him and turned with startled quickness.

Manuel stood there like a foolish scared cripple; his flat dull face was bleared with fright and much weeping.

"What you want?"

"I heard—heard the gun. I—" his body shivered, his voice shook; his was a half-cracked brain at best, and this night had been badly shaken—"I waited. Wanted—wanted him to tell me what to do. I—money—go—where to go?"

McGuire, in disgust, stared at him. This half idiot was Reena's husband!

Manuel was edging forward toward the body; there was the glimmer of a loathsome curiosity in his leaden eyes and his lips, even now, seem to grin nervously at the sight of blood.

"He killed himself. You saw it?" McGuire asked.

"No, no! I—yes—I was there—no, no I wasn't—I—" anxiously he peered toward McGuire— "What do you want me to say? I'll say what you—"

And McGuire said:

"Shut up! Get out of here!"

Manuel backed some steps away, then turned and ran.

CHAPTER VII

McGUIRE in coming from the house into the silent darkness shocked by what he had this night seen and heard, felt that the quietness under the thickly huddled shadows of the towering growth was indeed as if desolation had already settled here, as if all men had fled and would not return.

He too was anxious to get far away. Yet he was a little uncertain of where he wanted to go. There was an impulse to go at once to Brade's; another to go to Port Kingston and tell his story. McGuire at first had the uneasy thought that he might be accused of killing Symonds, but he felt reassured by the knowledge that Reena's story would make people understand why Symonds, with good reason, had killed himself. Now that all was made public the whole island would probably be aroused. He felt that the best that Zurdas could do would be to dodge away; and that Reena's troubles were at an end.

Magistrate Cullum, who had performed the marriage ceremony, could easily annul it, such being one of the prerogatives of administrating law and justice under a native king who was not yet overshadowed by the flag of any European country.

McGuire wished that he dared take the road; but that might lead to his stumbling against some of Zurdas' men who would hold him for Zurdas. So he knew that he must find his way through the jungle, or wait for daylight.

In the midst of whatever other thoughts he had there was anxiety over what had become of Reena. He guessed, as the most likely thing, that she had set out for Port Kingston to Morris and Mrs. Morris; and though uneasy he was almost confident that she would escape the search. Reena was not an hysterical girl; the night-jungle had no unfamiliar aspect, she knew the roads well, and perhaps had been for sometime on her way before it was discovered that she was gone.

McGuire went along readily enough to where the cane met the jungle; and though this was unfamiliar ground even here he trudged on for a time with assurance.

In spite of his excitement he was full of pain, and weary. He had been knocked about, badly bruised; his head hurt, the muscles ached, and his side burned with pain in a way that made him catch his breath.

After a time he became less certain of just where to look for the trail, for he walked in the midst of shadows. The rustling of the cane was like the shivering of many people, nearly motionless, clad in starched garments—a massed array of slim stalks that timidly menaced the hulking jungle with their leafy swords. At last he had to tell himself that he did not know how in the darkness to find his way, so there was nothing better to do than sit down and wait for the day.

He sat down wearily, glad to rest, but there was no rest. His bruises ached, whatever the position. He smoked and, time passing slowly, he fell into a troubled dozing.

II

A GRAY tint came into the sky, then almost at once a flush of light. A flight of pigeons swung low athwart the brake with creaking rustle of wings, going inland to find breakfast.

McGuire, arising, found his body stiff as that of an old man's full of rheumatism. He swore with feeling, rubbed his joints and set off, hobbling. He was not sure yet but that he had passed the trail. Walking on and on, he at last knew the trail lay far behind him, so he turned back, thus having lost time and having made his muscles creak uselessly. Doubling far back on his tracks he came to the trail. It was now up-grade going. He went slowly.

After a time he smelt smoke, but could see nothing for he was in the midst of the bush; but a half hour later when he emerged into Pealo's clearing he found only smoldering ashes where the hut had stood, and Pealo sat disconsolately by.

Pealo's thoughts were so heavy that he did not notice McGuire approach until he was near; then the old cripple gazed at him at first with a look that had in it no recognition. McGuire's face was swollen, bruised, discolored. Then, recognizing him, Pealo arose and with wild hobbling came close, angrily pouring out a story full of woe.

A man or two with lanterns had come up during the night from the road to Pealo's hut; they made a great clatter and told that Miss Reena had run away; if Pealo saw or heard of her from natives he was to let them know at the plantation —or have his hide stripped off for boot leather if he didn't. These fellows had seen McGuire's pony.

Later they must have told Zurdas. Just before dawn Zurdas came, alone, as if he knew what to find. Zurdas, with many loud words flying, knocked Pealo end over end. The daughter and her husband ran away.

Zurdas, as if with but little time to spare, fired the hut, made threats of further trouble, mounted and rode off, apparently having come for no other purpose than to teach the native what he called a lesson.

Pealo's eyes blazed in telling of the outrage, and of course again he rehearsed old wrong. He had often sworn revenge, and swore now again, loudly, but without doubt feared Zurdas almost as much as Zurdas boasted in saying that the blacks would shy from his old hat if it fell in the road. Pealo babbled wildly of white men's injustice and evoked heathen curses. He did not, as would have been the way with most natives, blame McGuire; this not because of any special friendship but because Pealo seemed to feel it was meritorious of McGuire to be so hated by Zurdas.

McGuire, however, took upon himself the blame, saying "it was my fault;" saying too:

"I'll give you money, so you can have a feast for friends when they build you another. And more, so Taleo can have new dresses and grow fat on salmon."

Pealo greedily stuck out his hands, wanting it then and there, wailing his loss as if he had owned a village burned by Zurdas.

"Tomorrow or the next day," said McGuire, emptying his pockets of small change. "This is all with me."

"How much?" Pealo insisted, wanting a promise. "As much as a boat?"

"Not hardly, no. I promised enough for a hut. What you think sticks an' leaves are worth in the jungle?"

"How much?" Pealo repeated, peering greedily. He had no way of judging money value except by the price of a boat, a gun, tinned goods, fishhooks, for he thought in terms of barter.

"Twenty dollars," said McGuire, being generous.

"How much that?"

"'Nough to get you an' all your friends so drunk you'll be thrown into the road gang!"

There being no jail on Kialo, natives were put to work when fined.

"No, no," said Pealo, with a kind of determination in which there seemed a sort of furtive resolution.

"Well, build your own house, and eat up the feast yourself, Pealo. I don't care. Don't care about anything," said McGuire, wearily.

The pony, having broken loose in fright at the fire, had not wandered. McGuire caught him, then hesitated, wondering just which way he had better go; that is, which way would have in it less risk of meeting Zurdas.

"I'll go to Brade's," he said.

He guessed that, Reena having gone to Port Kingston, Zurdas would be there. McGuire felt it would be wiser to go to Brade's, change his clothes, all dirty torn and blood-spotted, tell what he knew to Brade's men and the neighbors, then return with a friend or two to town.

III

WHEN he was near Brade's a man came from the bush at a distance and hailed him with a far shout; he then walked hastily toward McGuire and McGuire saw that it was old Grimes.

At the top of his voice and still far off, Grimes called with tone of approval—

"You've played ——, you have!"

He carried a shotgun and when he was near, he said with many oaths and no anger, even a grin as he staringly examined McGuire's face:

"Who bit you on the nose? Well you sure played ——! That girl is here—an' Zurdas with his men, here after her! They say you killed Symonds. How 'bout it?"

"Reena here! An' Zurdas?"

"She rode in las' night, near midnight. Said they'd killed *you*—Zurdas an' Symonds! We had a hot pow-pow, all hands! I said if they'd killed you, good work! I thought none but a hangman could do that! Then Zurdas come not a half hour 'go—said you'd killed Symonds. Didyou?"

"No!"

"You don't need lie to me. ——'s broke loose an' I'm willin'!"

Grimes grinned. His teeth were broken, his face fuzzy with a dirty gray beard. He tapped the shotgun and jiggled the game bag slung across his shoulder, making the shells rattle.

"What you up to?" McGuire asked.

"Me, ho! Zurdas is over there kickin' up the ground. Dust so thick he looks like the devil in smoke! Says if we don't turn you over an' turn the girl loose, he's goin' right up from the house there an' burn our mill. Hope he tries it, Dan! I'll be settin' right over there at the turn o' the road. He takes the wrong turn, I'll pot 'im! So you shot Symonds, eh?"

"He shot himself! He an' Zurdas killed Reena's father—made her marry that nigger Manuel. Was afraid of what the island would think when it heard, so—"

"Aw, ——," said Grimes. "Don't lie to me! I'm glad you started somethin'." He patted the shotgun and swore cheerfully. "If things keep on, we'll have some fun. I'd crawl on my belly a long ways to even up with Manuel." Grimes cursed him fluently. It was Manuel's lies that had, some years before, got Grimes a hiding from Zurdas.

"They won't give Reena over?" McGuire asked.

"They do, I quit an' go pearlin'! Old Brade's not sayin' much, but not budgin' a —— inch. Only it's Mrs. Brade that said, 'William, this poor child is scairt of him, and if you make her go, I go too!' Now that's what I call a proper Christian lady! Funny, ain't it, Dan, the women here on this —— island have got more backbone in 'em than the men! Fannin' hoppin' up an' down like the ground was too hot for his feet. Crazy-mad at what he calls ruinin' plantation work in a quarrel. 'Le's all be friends!' he says—though he's no friend o' yours, Dan! But you see the kid got home las' night—"

"What kid?"

"Young Brade. Fire busted loose at sea an' messed things up, so he put back, an' Dave hiked out home here late las' night. An' he's your friend, if Fannin' ain't!"

McGuire kicked at the pony's ribs, saying—

"I've got to get along an' tell 'em the truth!"

"Hey," Grimes called, "be sure to make Zurdas want to burn the mill—him an' that bunch o' —— too-raggers with 'im!" Then at the top of his voice to make the words carry, "My trigger finger's itchin' like a flea bite!"

IV

McGUIRE saw many people and four or five horses near the veranda steps. The riders had dismounted. He saw two women at the veranda railing, leaning across, looking down, listening; they were Mrs. Fanning and Mrs. Brade.

Old Brade, as if barring the way into his house against these unruly neighbors, stood halfway up on the veranda steps; his broad, stooped shoulders were thus above the heads of the men on the ground.

Fanning and Zurdas, though there was an old quarrel between them, were shoulder to shoulder now, facing Brade, making common cause. Three of Zurdas' men were grouped together with bridle reins on their arms; and close by stood two of Brade's overseers, listening sullenly and eying Zurdas. Near them were some of the natives that worked about the house and in the storeroom.

Some one noticed McGuire as he came jogging into view, and called out, pointing toward him. Men faced about in staring silence, watching him approach.

At any other time McGuire would have been laughed at. He was a clownish figure, being long-legged, on the small fat pony, and now his red hair stood out at tousled angles, his shirt was torn half off, his face was puffed and blackened from bruises. Brade's rough men did grin, but half in friendliness. McGuire was well liked.

Zurdas stepped from among the men and stood waiting.

An unidentified voice called—

"Look out for 'im, Dan!"

McGuire had no intention of trying to avoid him, and rode straight to where Zurdas stood; and Zurdas, wanting to grasp something and hurt it, snatched at the bridle and jerked again and again against the gentle pony's mouth so that it threw its head high with ears laid back, amazed and in pain; and loudly, that all might hear, Zurdas shouted—

"You killed Symonds!"

McGuire slid from the pony's back, his eyes on Zurdas.

Fanning rushed up and stopped short with hands half out as if to lay hold on McGuire and keep him from running off, but did not touch him. Fanning's handsome face had an anxious flush; he shook a fist accusingly, and said:

"You've made trouble! You killed Symonds! We won't protect a —— murderer—"

"Get out o' this, Fanning! As for you—" this to Zurdas—"when they hang you for murdering Reena Leslie's father, then I'll—"

McGuire spoke hurriedly, trying to get it all out for he saw what was coming. Zurdas' heavy face had grown black with scowling, and he jumped with both hands groping for McGuire's neck. He caught McGuire, shook him about, striking him, saying "You lie!" and shouting, "Say you lie!" So, thus wanting McGuire to deny his words, Zurdas somewhat eased his grip at the throat that McGuire might speak.

Cries and shouts had gone up as Zurdas reached for him. Brade's overseers jumped forward with arms swaying up and curses cracking on their lips, and they laid hold of Zurdas. Mrs. Fanning turned from the veranda railing and ran to a doorway, calling within. Then David Brade appeared and heard his mother and others cry—

"They're killing Dan!"

David jumped the railing and lurched in among the men who had pulled Zurdas' hands from McGuire. Even Zurdas' own men had helped at this, and somehow in the mix-up a fist had found its way to Fanning's face, but the blow, meant no doubt for his nose, had reddened only his cheek.

"You lie!" Zurdas shouted, both his arms being held by many hands. To pass the lie seemed his one argument. He struggled, or rather surged against those who held him, drawing unwilling men in scuffling trample nearer McGuire. "You lie to say I killed—"

David had got to McGuire's side, and now stepped before him, answering—

"Miss Reena was just telling me—telling me again—you killed her father!"

Zurdas answered—

"Lie! A lie! He is not dead! He was on your ship—he's that fellow calls himself Mann! McGuire knows it!" Then to the men that held him, "Let go me—"

The men, astonished at what he said, not quite understanding what it was all about, but impressed by his assurance, did let go of him. Zurdas shook himself, settling his clothing, pulled forward his hat brim; then, with characteristic gesture, pushed up the brim, making it stand straight against the crown.

"I shot him, yes!" said Zurdas, glaring. "Symonds paid me for it! Told me to! That's truth. I don't know how he come to life, but bring on the fellow. I'll face 'im! I stand to what I've done. And she—" a backhanded gesture indicated the house—"she's my son's wife and goes home with me or—"

The threat being left unfinished could mean any evil thing; and Zurdas, tall, broad, heavy, glared as if meaning whatever any one might care to think.

"Her father? Her father!" said David in almost a voice of awe. "Is Mann her father, Dan?"

For a moment McGuire himself seemed just a little bewildered as if his thoughts were darting helter-skelter for what to say; then with the conscious leisureliness of one who knows that silence waits upon him, he took his pipe from a pocket, and looking down fingered it. He glanced up at David, at Zurdas, at the other men. A kind of smile flickered on his battered face. He gestured with the stem of the pipe, pointing at Zurdas, asking—

"You say you shot her father?"

"Symonds paid me! Yes, I did."

"Left him for dead?"

"Symonds wanted his wife. That's how it was. I'll face 'im—"

"Left him for dead, did you?" McGuire repeated.

"Pitched headlong from his horse. When I went up—yes, I thought him dead, but—"

"Well," said McGuire, "he is—dead! Here before all men you admit you murdered him! Killed the girl's father then made her marry that half-breed son of yours!"

Zurdas swore hotly, though just a little mystified for, so thoroughly had he been persuaded this Mr. Mann was from Honduras, that he could not readily understand just what McGuire meant; but what McGuire said made him, anyhow, furious. He wanted to fight, but also he wanted to know what McGuire meant, and asked just that:

"What'd you mean! What'd you mean?"

"Zurdas, I mean that here, before these men, you have admitted murder of Reena's father!"

"Why"—this with fury, heightened by the rapidly increasing feeling that he had been tricked— "you said this man was— Did you—have you—oh, if you have—" Zurdas' tongue stumbled, blundering in his anger as he tried to ask the question, for he was fearful of the answer; but he swung up his heavy fist and with one long step forward towered over McGuire, shouting, "Who is that fellow? God blast your soul! The truth—the truth! You tell me!"

"So? Last night—remember? You said, 'Lie to me. Lie, if you dare!' So I did. Now you want the truth, Zurdas? All right. That man is not Reena's father. I don't know who the —— he is. And I don't care. But I used him to scare you. And I did. Scared Symonds, too, into suicide. He thought he was going to have to face the man he'd got you to kill. An' you've admitted here you did kill him! So Zurdas, it's your turn to lie. Lie to me, and these men here!"

At that moment, though Zurdas stood rigidly with eyes fixed in a half-dazed stare at McGuire, there was no doubt as to what he meant next to do; but for that one long moment he was confused, amazed, and had been so convinced by what McGuire had said last night that he almost believed that what McGuire said now was the lie, trickily turned to make a fool of him; yet, with increase of wrath and almost frantic bafflement, he quickly sensed that this was truth and that he had been made to seem a fool, an utter fool, one that had babbled shameful confession.

But Zurdas did nothing of what was expected, for David thrust McGuire aside and stood in his tracks. Zurdas' face seemed swollen with dark blood. Checked from striking McGuire, as every impulse within him had intended, he still stood motionless and, being motionless, tried to think. The dazed baffled look that came into his eyes showed how dizzily he was groping for what to say, if not indeed for what to think. He was confused in trying to understand how McGuire could have known so much without Leslie's having told him; and for all Zurdas said otherwise, he knew Symonds had killed himself; the gun was found half under Symonds' rigid fingers, the wound was powder-burned and at the front of his forehead; but most of all, he knew why

Symonds had thought death better than facing the infuriated ghost who had, it seemed, somehow got flesh and bones to wear.

Zurdas had cunning, much cruelty, some courage, and the devil's own stubbornness, but tripped and entangled by this McGuire, whom he had regarded with much of a ruthless man's contempt, he could here use none of those things. It was like Zurdas, like the merest taint of cowardice in his cunning, that though full of anger that would have paid any price to have its way, yet he struck at no one. He would, with half a chance, then and there, have killed McGuire; left to himself he would have done it slowly, with jeering, and amusing torture.

But David waited hopefully, almost toe to toe, wanting a fight; and Zurdas knew the boy was the stronger. He knew better than all who had watched the race-track fight how much of strength had been left in David's fists when his own arms had sagged from their own weight.

So they stood, all men there, in astonished silence, waiting what Zurdas would do. Then a man, one of Brade's rough whites, snickered and leered at Zurdas' men, but they, uncomfortable and with no heart in Zurdas' cause, awkwardly took pains not to notice.

Old Brade himself now spoke. Having come close by, and heard and watched, he now turned to McGuire and asked with simple trustfulness—

"Is this you say true, Dan?"

And McGuire answered:

"Aye, true as tongue can make it!"

Then Zurdas who, when sober, was no fool and did have cunning sharp and quick as a snake's tooth, jeered:

"Truth, huh? No! *You* murdered Symonds! And if you want, I'll tell Morris, yes, I killed that man on Honduras—and others, too, for it was war! But Symonds *is* her father! Huh, her father, though Leslie was the mother's husband! Now you understand? That's why she run away with Symonds—loved him, called him her true husband in spite of what priests said of it! But right now you go with me. By —— I'll take you. You murdered Symonds!"

He seemed about to lurch aside and reach for McGuire; David swung to one side too and, with grin of eager anger and fist drawn back, meant to strike; but old Brade's hand reached slowly up and put down his son's arm.

Then Brade quietly, with old eyes steady in a look at Zurdas, said—

"Dan stays with us."

He stopped. Some men murmured with approval. Then old Brade added calmly—

"The girl too."

Such few words, though complete in meaning, among so much hot speech were so strangely laconic that men waited expectantly for him to say more, but having spoken, Brade stood without moving and added nothing.

Zurdas lowered his tone in a way that heightened the menace, and asked:

"You want trouble, do you? With *me?*"

Fanning spoke up quickly, saying:

"No. No, Zurdas! I've got as much to say here as any man. You leave it all to me, Zurdas and—"

"Leave nothing!" said Zurdas. "They go with me now, him there an' my son's wife, or by —— I ruin you! Brade, what'd you say?"

Fanning began to talk hotly, telling Brade it mustn't be, he wouldn't have it, what Zurdas asked was right. The men, even Zurdas' men, looked anxiously at old Brade and hoped he would not weaken, and some muttered jeers at Fanning.

Brade heard him, of course, and in a way Fanning had the right to say what he did; but Brade did not so much as turn his head. He was looking at Zurdas, and continuing to look at him lifted his arm and pointed toward the horses, then spoke one word and that quietly, saying—

"Go!"

Zurdas' astonishment at being defied was increased by being defied calmly; in his own quarrels he worked himself into a drunkenness of anger, and other men usually did the same. Brade's simplicity in speech made Zurdas honestly feel that the old man did not realize what trouble with him would be like; and so he said:

"This means ruin for you! By ——, I'll ruin you, all you—"

Brade listened; he made no sign more than to stand with solemn staring as Zurdas added threat to threat and made men feel he would do what he said; but old Brade's only answer was to point again toward the horses and say nothing.

So Zurdas, after a moment's utterly baffled look, turned and with strides as if at each step he drove his heel into something that he hated, marched toward the horses. His men without haste, even reluctantly, with some calling from one to another to come on, followed.

They galloped off, straggling; Zurdas in the lead beat with whip and spurs, as if defeated and in flight.

CHAPTER VIII

McGUIRE, having washed and got into fresh clothes, sat on the sea chest in his hut and looked up at David who moved his feet about restlessly as he stood before him and talked.

"I told Mr. Mann, late yesterday afternoon when we got in, that he could pick up a ride on the wagon of one of our neighbors in the morning. I asked him to come on out here and stay a while, and he's coming. Fine fellow, seems like, though not much to say. Of course I came on home. It was well after dark when I walked in.

"Mother, you know how mother is! She was so glad to have me come stamping in she was almost glad I'd had a fire an' lost some hard-earned dollars. I was hungry too, and wanted something quick. Coffee and beans would have been fine. But mother acted as if I'd been gone a year. I had to wait for a roast chicken. And she made a pudding. 'Boys like sweets.' From the time I was as high as my knee I remember her saying that. We were in the kitchen—you know how she bustles when I come home.

"Father sat there. You know his way—saying nothing and listening. When they are that eager to have me home, I get a kind of shamed feeling that makes me almost stay. I think now I will. He's never asked it of me, but mother does.

"I'd told 'em three times over about the fire. Blazed up sudden in the trade room. We —— near unshipped the deck-house an' heaved it over. Lost my mains'l too. So we just put about an' come home. The excitement of it seemed to do Mann good. Took his mind off whatever 'tis that 's troubled 'im. He helped a lot by keepin' cool an' tellin' the crew what next to do. Not like a landsman. Said he'd been a soldier, an' I'll bet a good one too! I told 'im that saying of yours— 'it's hard work an' bad luck as makes a good sailor!'— an' he almost laughed. Did smile an' nod.

"I'd told the old folks all about all that, an' was pickin' the bones to the last bit o' gristle, with mother across the table just looking at me. And Dan, I can't explain, but then I seemed to feel that it wasn't right to be away from her. And father looked so old. We were just talking of you. Mother likes you—always has. She's gentle, so eager and mild, but bless her! when her mind's made up, there's no moving her.

"We heard a horse running. 'Maybe that's Dan now' I said. 'Not on the pony!' mother said, and laughed. Then she asked father, 'Did Fanning go to town?' Father just shook his head, listening. The horse had stopped near the house. We listened a bit, then heard nothing more, and didn't think much about it—just maybe somebody riding over to Fanning's house. We went on talking.

"Next we heard steps, light steps and slow as if somebody wasn't quite sure where they was. 'Who can it be?' said Mother. Father turned about and looked toward the door. I called 'Who's there?' and got no answer. Funny, I thought. So I picked up the lamp. Went to the door and—I tell you at first I didn't know her! It was like a—like a—Dan, she looked so wonderful and strange! Her face in the lamplight was so—so— She didn't look real! She had seen the light in the kitchen and come toward it. Her first words were, 'They've killed Dan McGuire!' Then she stood right there in the doorway.

"I've seen her almost all my life, but somehow she didn't seem the same girl. She was taller, seemed so tall—I'd thought of her as a little girl. And the way she looked at me! Her eyes! I stood right there, holding the lamp up high. Mother had asked, 'Who killed Dan?' And she told us what had happened. I was holding the lamp up all the time. Afterward when I put it down my arm ached."

He rubbed his arm now as if memory of the ache lingered still in the muscles.

"Dan, it was the way—the way she stood there and looked. Her voice too. 'He was my friend and yours. So I came to tell you! They have killed him! Manuel said they had killed him!'

"She told us—it was just one thing to make you gasp after another—and the way she looked, you just knew what she said was so about Symonds and Zurdas.

" 'You poor child!' said mother, and put out her arms. But Miss Reena put out only a hand and stood looking at me, then at father. She told us how you came to be there, and how they had jumped on you from all sides. She said they guessed that she meant to run away and tell what they had done, and put a man outside her door, but she cut the screen with a pair of scissors. She took a piece of candle and some matches and went to the stable and into the corral in the dark, and saddled a horse. Then in the candle light she tied gunny bags on the horse's feet—she had read in a book of a man who did that—then she led the horse past the house. Then she took off the sacks and rode here. What a girl!

"She said she did not go to Mr. Morris in town because she was afraid he would believe Symonds and Zurdas for they would say that she was crazy. She said that we were your friends, so she came to us."

David was young, earnest, honest. Something of the bewilderment that had come upon him standing face to face with the beautiful girl who, in tragic dignity, had come out of the night and told her story of wrongs, remained with him still; and he frowned in such honest puzzlement that McGuire with bruised lips smiled to hear him say:

"Dan, I never knew a woman could so make you want to fight! I didn't know what I was saying until mother said, 'David, stop that swearing!'

"Father asked, 'They have killed Dan?' And she said, 'Yes. I could not stay there. I did not know where else to go. When they learn that I am here they will come to take me.'

Then mother said, "'William, this child does not leave our house until she wants to go. You tell old Zurdas and Mr. Symonds that!'

"And Father, as is his way, did not say anything; but when we took a lantern and went out, I said to him, 'You won't let Zurdas take her?' He said, 'No,' and I knew he wouldn't.

"And Dan, I thought of what you said about how I would feel if I stood face to face with her. And I did feel just that way, and wanted to do anything in the world that she wanted me to do! But I couldn't believe you then because you were drunk and you know how you joke, and I had never seen her so close and just looked at her!"

McGuire wanted to laugh and he wanted to swear; he felt amused and a little bitter, so he suddenly began to pull at a torn fingernail and did not look up for a long time.

He realized now why David, so suddenly, had almost determined not to go more to sea. He was glad this wonderful understanding had come upon David, and wished Reena the happiness of it; but nevertheless a kind of pain fluttered about in the secret places of his heart.

"I went down to where the men were and roused them out, and Father went over to Fanning's house. The men stood around the light in their underclothes and half naked, yawning and cursing and made me tell over and over what she had said. I was for going right over to Symonds, and the other fellows too excepting old Bob Grimes. He got a pipe and sat down and put his bare feet up on the table and said:

" 'They never killed Dan—not him. He's too smart a lad. When the Lord was handin' out brains, Dan showed up with a washtub! I'll bet my pay he just played dead so they'd let 'im crawl off.'

"He saw I didn't like the way he talked, and he said:

" 'See here, Dave. If you Brades want to start a war with Zurdas an' Symonds an' all their friends, that suits me and all us lads 'cept Fanning. He'll pull 'gainst it like a ship on her hawser at tide-turn. But I'm too experienced in not gettin' hung to make a fool o' myself, or let you. Now I like Dan, an' I don't blame him for what he's done—but supposin' some one o' their men had been caught tryin' to run off with somebody's wife here?"

Grimes also had said, though David omitted this now, that a girl who would want to run off with Dan would show she was no —— good!

But David did say:

"Grimes made me so mad I cussed him, but I don't understand fellows like Grimes, Dan. He's thin and scrawny and old, but he got up off that chair like an old rooster, and he said, 'Look here young fellow! Don't get it into your head I'm tryin' to back out of a fight or we'll have one now, you an' me!' And he meant it, Dan. So I felt maybe he wasn't afraid.

"Then he said, 'You listen to me, Dave. I'll tell you what's what an' how to go about it. I'm above sixty year, an' I've learned this: Make the other fellow carry all the blame, then if you can't lick 'im, some judge 'll do it for you! Now you fellows all listen— The girl's here. She's got a hard story to tell o' them over there. Sure as ——'s a foot deep, Zurdas 'll be over here to make us give 'er up. If she don't want to go, we'll keep 'er. Then Zurdas 'll start trouble. We want it just as much as he does, but we want 'im to start it. Then people all over the island won't line up 'gainst us an' lick the tar out of us. An' when the gunboats come puffin' in—they'll come; they always come—I been in an island row or two before, an' they always come—why, when they do, all the evidence'll be that Zurdas an' Symonds started the ruckus.

" 'I'm not scairt o' Zurdas, but I'm blasted eager to have them kid captains o' British gunboats say, "Mr. Grimes, fortunately the evidence indicates that you had this quarrel thrust upon you!"

" 'I know them young devils. They're supposed to take you to Sydney for trial, but they've got a way o' hangin' you themselves an' takin' the report to Sydney. I know 'em. I was in the labor trade till they hung the skipper an' give me the chance to jump over-board one night where sharks was thick as fleas on a dog. But I fooled 'em. I got me a sack o' pepper an' drug it along behind me in the water. I had sharks sneezin' all over the bay.

" 'But now serious, Dave, my word is, Let's play this thing sens'ble. If they have killed Dan, we'll even up the blood-score. If they haven't, we've got the girl. If we go rampin' over there, they may sneak in here an' get 'er. If we set tight, Zurdas 'll make 'nough trouble to give us the chance to do what we want.'

"And Dan," said David, being honest but feeling apologetic, "that's why we didn't go right over there last night. And when Fanning came in he said if we did do anything like that, all the consuls would make reports against us.

"But old Grimes is a queer one! Fanning was talking about how we must be careful, and Grimes said, 'I had the same idees till you got to talkin'; hearin' you makes me think maybe I'm wrong. If you don't shut up, I'll go over an' shoot somebody an' say you sent me!'

"I don't understand men like Grimes. He's something like you, Dan." McGuire, from under lowered lids, with sidelong glance gazed at David who had wrinkled his forehead in trying to say just what he meant. "You can't tell what he means by what he says, and he jokes at times he oughtn't. Skinny as a rope and thinks it's fun to get half drunk. Yet like you, Dan, you can't scare 'im. But I wouldn't trust him very far, though."

"Aw, get along with your story," said McGuire. "I want to hear. As for Grimes, we were hatched in the same nest and are birds of a feather."

"Well, Father said we should keep nothin' hid, and early this morning he sent a black over to Symonds' to tell that Reena was here. Zurdas and his men come. They thought because Father had sent word he wanted them to take her. The way Zurdas shouted when he found Father did not mean at all to give her up! He said he was going to raise —— and begin by burning our mill. Bob Grimes he spoke up, 'You do that, Zurdas. You've made the threat, now try it. I'll go up along toward the mill and be waitin'.' Then Grimes went off.

"Zurdas said you had killed Symonds. It was the first we knew you were still alive. Mother, right from the veranda there, told him she didn't believe it. Zurdas thought you had got here and we were hiding you. He said he would tell in town we were keeping Miss Reena against her will. Mother said for me to have Miss Reena come out and say before these people that she didn't want to go with Zurdas, and that would settle it.

"She got up and came out and walked right to the railing and looked straight at Zurdas and she said, 'I have asked these people to let me stay here with them, and I have told them why.'

"Zurdas wouldn't listen to anything more. I think he was afraid she would tell again what she had told us. He started to make threats and say what he would do.

"I said, 'Don't listen to him, Miss Reena.' Then she looked at me in a kind of frightened way and did not say anything until I went with her into the room again. Then she said, 'He will do all he says. I bring bad luck to every one, David—' she called me David!— 'and I see now that I ought to go back.' Then in a minute you rode up out there."

McGuire smoked on. He was now half-minded to tease David, recalling to him that this was the same girl he had but some few short days before spurned when she then had sought a refuge from the dark house where she was more or less of a prisoner. But McGuire felt more like jeering bitterly than teasing; so he, who was not often at a loss for something to say, said nothing.

David paced about restlessly with a kind of dazed preoccupied expression that McGuire noticed and, mentally, remarked as love.

Then McGuire got up and put out his hand and, in a way that left no doubt that he was serious, said—

"David, I'm glad."

"What do you mean, Dan?"

"What's the one thing of all this mess that has made *you* glad?"

David's face lighted with understanding.

"You mean Miss Reena?"

"She's a fine girl, and's never been happy. It's for you to make all that up to her."

"And for what you've done, Dan—I owed you enough before! This is the most wonderful thing that ever happened. Just to be able to feel, you know, that I am protecting her—helping protect her!"

"That's what good men are for—to serve women better than themselves. And are lucky when they get a chance! That half-mock marriage to Manuel, we'll knock it galley-west with twenty words to Cullum. So—" this was the beginning of one of Grimes' ribald songs— "so go get on your Sunday clothes, but tip the bottle lightly, or else you'll kiss the parson's nose when he's married you right rightly!"

David looked confused, grew a bit red under his dark tan, didn't know what to do with his hands, and suddenly catching McGuire's shoulder began pulling:

"Come on. They told me to bring you back up to the house. They want to see you again."

"They, who?"

"Mother, Mrs. Fanning—and Reena!"

II

DAVID was called aside by his father, as they neared the house, to go with him for a word with Fanning. McGuire went on alone.

McGuire had looked into his broken mirror and, somewhat fascinated by his bruised appearance which gave him an unfamiliar aspect, he consoled himself with the thought that as manly beauty had never been a distinguishing feature with him, no real harm had been done. Yet with a bit of mild envy he glanced after David, broad and tall, with a clean muscular face; more handsome by far in a manly way than Fanning, and as blind to it as Fanning to his faults.

Reena was on the veranda with Mrs. Fanning. Mrs. Fanning, having always had a kind of affectionate curiosity about McGuire, who seemed so mild and good-natured for one generally regarded as a rascal, greeted him with lively welcome.

Mrs. Fanning was plain-spoken and good-hearted; life with Fanning, becoming more and more unpleasant, had softened rather than sharpened her alert attitude of challenge to the world which had been rather noticeable when she first arrived on Kialo.

"You're the second live hero I ever saw!" said Mrs. Fanning, giving a swipe at her loose hair which, as usual, seemed about to get away from its pins. "And how do you feel, Dan?"

"Better 'n I look. Who was that other hero? Was he so scared, too, he couldn't run—so got credit for standing still?"

Reena had come near him and waited a little hesitantly for him to notice her. Mrs. Fanning laughed, with something like half-hidden bitterness behind the laughter, and said:

"He never seemed a hero to me, Dan. I knew him too well, I guess. Was a kind of relative and had stomach trouble. I I used to wonder how he looked when he was doing the things that got him medals. But I know what you want. A drink? I'll bring it!"

She knew his weakness and though she disapproved, yet woman-like was eager to please, and walked along the veranda with long hurrying mannish strides and went indoors.

Reena put her hands to McGuire's arms with about the same naturalness as if he were a brother, and with smile and serious up-turned gaze said:

"I want to say so many things at once! I can't. Oh, everybody here likes you so much!"

She said it with a kind of pride, as if greatly pleased that her own liking was confirmed.

"Should," said McGuire.

"And I like everybody here!"

"That's right, too," he said, but now seriously, though he almost mentioned David with a hint of teasing. But he did not feel like teasing. The thing that hurt was that when women liked him, the liking seemed tinged with a kind of pity.

"Old Mrs. Brade is the sweetest woman! And Mrs. Fanning! I didn't know there were such people, Dan. Last night I thought they 'd killed you." Her hands on his arm pressed tightly. "That's why I got away and came here!"

"It was your bolting that saved my neck. Zurdas forgot me when he found you'd gone!"

"I thought they'd killed you!" Her fingers moved down along his arm and closed on his hand, holding it. "And I am afraid of Zurdas. I am afraid—" she almost whispered—"he will make these people wish they had never seen me."

"He'll have a hard time of it."

"You," she asked with dark eyes lifted in a kind of hopeful assurance, "You aren't sorry?"

"For what?"

"The way they hurt you?"

"They're worse off. If the dead know anything, Symonds' ghost knows what Zurdas learned too. I said your father was not dead; was on the island. Fear of meeting him made Symonds shoot himself. And I half believed Zurdas when he said Symonds, in Honduras, had put him up to the murder."

"I hardly know how to think of having

a father, a real father. But my father is really dead, Dan?"

"Aye. They don't live after Zurdas thinks they're dead. And don't you trouble yourself with the thought that the Brades don't want you here."

"And how can I thank you, Dan? How make you understand that—"

"Yes, I need some thanks. Botch the job an' get caught! You got away yourself. I'm the one to be thankful."

"I like to hear you say it, Dan, though it isn't true! But it makes me feel—don't you see?—as if I had helped."

Mrs. Fanning came with a tumbler half full of gin, saying:

"I was pouring whisky, but mother got the gin. 'Dan likes this best,' she said. You're being spoiled. We women like it—like spoiling you men!"

"But don't like us after you've done it?"

"Now you have told the truth!" said Mrs. Fanning. "And some people, Dan, say you never do! Zurdas must think you are a wonderful liar! But weren't you lucky to have that man—his name is Mann they say—to talk about!"

"His name isn't Mann. He just took it here on Kialo to hide under."

"You don't mean—Dan, it couldn't be!" Mrs. Fanning looked toward Reena, then half expectantly toward McGuire.

"No. Not a chance. I'd like to think it. Mann *is* after somebody, but when I did mention Honduras there wasn't a flicker in his eyes. And I just told Reena, people Zurdas kills don't come to life."

"You did!" said Mrs. Fanning. "We thought you dead."

"Zurdas didn't think so."

"What do you think he's going to try to do, Dan—Zurdas?" Mrs. Fanning asked.

"I don't know. He may try to make 'em think in town that I did kill Symonds. Well Manuel knows I didn't. I'll get hold of him, if it comes to that. But I doubt if Zurdas even tries to make that story stick. His way is to use a whip. He's good at it."

TO BE CONTINUED

The Order of Military Merit

BY

ARTHUR WOODWARD

RARELY has any military decoration of such primal importance as the Order of Military Merit, which was the great-grandfather of all the highest military decorations ever issued by the United States, suffered the vicissitudes of fate as those undergone by the badge first issued by George Washington in his special order issued at headquarters, Newburgh-on-the-Hudson, Wednesday, August 7, 1782.

The Purple Heart Badge of Military Merit was originally granted as a means to "foster and encourage every species of military merit." It consisted of "the figure of a heart in purple cloth, or silk, edged with narrow lace or binding" and "the author of it shall be permitted to wear (it) on his facings, over his left breast."

The names of the men who, during the course of the war, received the badge were to be enrolled in "the book of merit."

Unfortunately that book has been lost, and so far as the known surviving records show, this decoration, the first "medal" of honor ever granted to United States soldiers for meritorious service, was granted to only three men, all of them non-commissioned officers, although the badge was to be given to privates and non-coms alike who performed deeds worthy of note.

These men were: Sergeant Daniel Bissell, of Captain David Humphrey's company of the Second Connecticut regiment of the Continental Line; Sergeant William Brown, of Captain Samuel Comstock's company of the Fifth Connecticut regiment of the Continental Line; and Sergeant Elijah Churchill, of the fourth troop of the second regiment Light Dragoons, an outfit also recruited in Connecticut. It would appear that the "Nutmeggers" were as brave as they were reputed to be cunning in trade.

Of these three official badges not one is known to exist. That of Sergeant Brown was last heard of as being in the possession of his descendants, but its fate is uncertain.

There is but one known existing specimen of this order, which is being preserved by the New Hampshire Society of the Cincinnati. Unfortunately there is no data on it. To whom it belonged or when it was issued, must in all likeliness forever remain a mystery. There is romance however in the story of its discovery.

A member of the Society of the Cincinnati, so the story goes, was prowling about an abandoned New England farm. In the barn, suspended from a wooden peg, he found the rotting and moth-eaten remnants of a blue-and-buff coat. On the floor beneath the peg lay the remainder of the garment where it had been dropped by the moths and the hand of time. Sewn on what remained of the left breast of the dark blue home-spun uniform was a Purple Heart. It was of sprigged silk, once purple, now faded to a steel gray, bound with a narrow edging of tarnished metal braid. That was all. No record of the owner. He who hung it there has long since been turned to dust. Only the mute and unsung symbol of his forgotten valor remains.

The Valley of

A New Kind of Ranch Foreman Deals with Cattle-Rustlers

THE big Tomahawk—saloon, gambling palace, honkatonk—blazed with lights. Cowboys jostled each other at the long bar, or laughed and made merry with the girls who thronged the rooms. The roulette whirred, poker-chips rattled and the voices of the dealers droned above the roar of the crowd.

It was the big night of the month in Tomahawk—pay night on the Reber ranches. And pay night on the Reber ranches meant that all the small ranches to the north would also pay off and let their men come to town. There was no limit to anything. Reber owned the Tomahawk Saloon; owned nearly everything else in the town of Tomahawk, as far as that was concerned.

And with one exception he owned all of Reber Valley. It had been known as Tomahawk Valley, and was still Tomahawk Valley on the map, but to those who lived there it was Reber Valley. For Park Reber owned the M 33, Half-Wheel, Circle S, Two Bar X and the Lightning. There was really only one ranch he did not own, the S Bar P. There was another little place twenty miles south of Tomahawk which belonged to Jack Silver, who had never registered any brand. So, outside of the S Bar P, Park Reber really owned the valley.

In an area thirty miles long by about fifteen miles in width Park Reber was supreme—a real cattle baron. And Park Reber sat in his big house in Tomahawk town, all alone except for a Chinese cook, and gloated. He was *the* big man of the country—big and lonesome. And sometimes he was mad, they said. Men worked for him, spent their money in his saloon and gambling house; but none of them admired him.

He was about sixty years of age—white-haired, harsh of feature, his deep-set eyes gloomy. Over his left eye was a white scar like a crescent moon, and he often touched it, as if it annoyed him. He drove his men hard, demanded results and got most of their wages back *via* the green cloth.

It had taken him twenty years to become owner of the valley.

His herds, the Diamond R brand, roamed the many hills. While his ranches were all designated by their original brand names, all the stock was branded with the Diamond R. Other ranches shipped from Tomahawk, but the Diamond R was the heavy shipper. They owned the loading corrals—or rather Reber did.

Park Reber did not come often to the Tomahawk Saloon, but he had been coming oftener of late. Some said it was because of June Meline, the tall, black-haired beauty who played the violin. She was not a fiddler. There seemed a difference between June Meline and the rest of

Lost Herds

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

By W. C. TUTTLE

the girls of the honkatonk. Her white skin was untouched by rouge or paint and there was an imperious lift to her well shaped head. Nor did she mix with the others.

Park Reber loved music and most of all he loved the wailing notes of her violin. Often she had come to his table to talk with him. She refused drinks, but liked to discuss with him his business troubles. Some said she was trying to "rope-in" the old man, but Park Reber knew better. He admired her level-headed way of looking at things.

And on this pay night Park Reber came again, taking his usual table, where he might drink and watch the show. With him was "Slim" Patterson, foreman of the Half-Wheel ranch. Their table was near the platform, where the three-piece orchestra rattled out its tin-panny music.

The show was just at its height as they sat down. There was a burst of applause as June Meline came out carrying her violin. She was dressed in black silk, which accentuated the pallor of her skin. Only the piano played her accompaniment, and as she lifted her violin the pianist hesitated.

Some one had spoken a word aloud—the name of a man.

"'Buck' Priest!"

And there he stood, not more than six feet away from Park Reber, backed by two of his men. It was the first time Buck Priest had ever been in the Tomahawk Saloon. He was as old as Park Reber, possibly older. He wore his hair long, but his thin, evil face, with the hawkbill nose, was smooth-shaven. He wore a silver-trimmed sombrero, buckskin shirt, gray trousers tucked in the tops of his high-heeled boots, and around his waist was a wide, beautifully carved leather cartridge belt supporting a holstered Colt.

The men with him were hard-bitted cowboys—fighting men of the S Bar P. It took nerve for Buck Priest to lead his men in among the cowboys of the Diamond R. But Buck Priest had nerve. He had fought Park Reber until Reber had told his men to leave the S Bar P alone.

At one time—over twenty years ago—these two men had been comrades.

It was evident that Buck Priest was drunk this night. He was not a drinking man, but once a year Buck Priest would get drunk; and when he got drunk, he was so cold-blooded that even his own men did not wish to associate with him.

It seemed as if every man in the room were holding his breath. Park Reber got slowly to his feet, and Priest laughed harshly.

"You dirty old cow thief!"

Buck Priest fairly hissed the words at Reber.

"You sneakin' old rustler!"

No one moved; no one spoke. The two

men, one on each side of Buck Priest, were bent forward tensely, their eyes sweeping the room, ready to draw and shoot at the first move. Park Reber's eyes blinked angrily, but he held still, staring at Buck Priest.

"I'm talkin' to you, Reber," said Priest slowly. "Callin' you a thief. And you ain't gut guts enough to deny it. You've rustled my cows just as long as you're goin' to, Reber. I've come into the lion's den to tell yuh what I think of yuh, you cow thief!"

There could be but one answer to that accusation. Reber had been a gun-man, but of late years he had left that distinction to his hired men. He did not wear a belt and gun, but under his left arm-pit was a holstered Colt; and now he jerked back, reaching for this concealed gun.

It was what Buck Priest wanted, what he came there to force Park Reber to do—reach for a gun. His hand streaked down to his thigh and whipped up a big black-handled revolver. For a fraction of a second Park Reber's life was not worth a penny. Something flashed between Reber and Priest just as Priest pulled the trigger — something that smashed against Priest's hand and arm, partly ruining the shot which was intended for Park Reber's heart.

The big gun thundered as Buck Priest jerked sidewise. Park Reber stepped backward against his chair, tripped and fell to the floor. Priest and his two men whirled and headed for the doorway, and the crowd gave them plenty of room.

Men lifted Reber to his feet and then set him in a chair.

"That fiddler girl!" exclaimed one of them. "She threw her fiddle and hit Buck Priest on the arm."

The girl sprang from the platform and was at Park Reber's side in a moment, and he smiled at her. Slim Patterson ripped away the shoulder of his coat. The room was in an uproar. No one thought of going after Buck Priest. Some one went after a doctor, who came in a few minutes.

The bullet had struck high in Reber's shoulder, and he was quite ill. The doctor, skilled in gunshot cases, told him he was very lucky. Some one had recovered the violin, but it had been walked on until it hardly resembled an instrument. The girl looked ruefully at it, but said nothing.

Several of the cowboys secured a cot, using it in lieu of a stretcher, and carried Reber home; but not until he had received June Meline's assurance that she would act as his nurse.

"I wish you would," said the doctor. "Nurses are hard to find out here. And, anyway, your violin is broken."

"I'll buy yuh a carload," said Reber weakly. "Don't leave me alone with Hop Lee and this darned doctor. I've got lots of room up there, June."

And so June Meline became nurse for Park Reber. She knew little about nursing and told Park Reber so. But he grinned painfully and told her he didn't know much about being shot, as far as that was concerned.

She took up her residence in the big old house, which was really a ranch-house, in the town. Hop Lee, the old Chinese cook, who cared for no one except Park Reber, took to June and actually smiled at her.

It was a new sensation to Park Reber, this idea of having a woman around. Not in nearly twenty-five years had he seen a woman in his house. His five foremen came at irregular intervals to report to him, and June often heard the name of Buck Priest spoken.

There was another name that caused Park Reber to curse—the name of Jack Silver.

It seemed that Jack Silver's name was connected with the word "rustler". There were two of these foreman that June did not like—Nort Jackson of the Lightning and Dave McLeese of the Two Bar X.

Nort Jackson was tall, thin, swarthy, black of eye, and wore a weak black mustache. He smiled at her too much, June thought. McLeese was ruddy of skin, with cold blue eyes under huge blonde brows. His nose had been broken across the arch and a huge scar twisted his mouth into a leer. Reber told her McLeese had been kicked in the face by a shod horse.

IT WAS several days after the shooting of Reber. Up to this time he had not mentioned Buck Priest to her. The doctor had finished dressing the wound and had given her orders for the feeding of the patient. Reber had been watching her closely for quite a while.

"Gettin' tired of bein' nurse to an old man?" he asked suddenly.

June smiled at him and shook her head.

"No, I'm not tired, Mr. Reber."

"That's good. I like you, June. You saved my life that night. Buck Priest is a good shot. He meant to kill me, yuh see. You shore thought real quick, June. You've got a head, girl. I've watched yuh around here and I've talked to yuh. You've got sense—too much sense to be playing a violin in a honkatonk."

June smiled at him.

"One must eat, Mr. Reber. And you have paid me better than I could get any other place."

"You've earned it, June. I wondered how they'd take yore kind of music. But cowboys are sentimental. I've seen 'em cry over yore music. Give the average cowboy a few drinks and he'll cry over 'Home Sweet Home'. Yes, they will, June. Lot's of 'em never had a regular home; lots of 'em were kicked out early in life—but they'll cry, just the same."

"I suppose," said June, nodding.

"And you never asked me anythin' about Buck Priest. That night he called me a dirty cow thief, didn't he?"

Park Reber smiled bitterly.

"Mebbe Buck was drunk. He's hated me for years, June. Oh, I'm no angel. I tried to run Buck out of this country. He's a fighter. He's not sorry he shot me, but sorry he didn't kill me."

"Why didn't you have him arrested, Mr. Reber?"

"Arrested? For shootin' me? Why, no, June, it was an even break. My shoulder-holster—well, it isn't a fast draw. I'd have killed him. Oh, he hates me! Funny, isn't it, June? We used to be pardners—me and Buck.

"And it was all over a woman—a woman like you, June. She was like you in lots of ways, I think. The valley wasn't what it is now. Tomahawk was a tradin' post. This girl came here with her family in a covered wagon. I was in the south end of the valley at that time, where me and Buck had a small herd of cattle. Buck was here at the post, and met her.

"He was two days late bringing in supplies, and when he came he told me about her. I told him he was a fool to even think of a girl. It was a bad country to bring a girl into. The Cheyennes were unfriendly then, and there were a lot of them in the valley. They stole cattle and horses. It kept us busy protectin' our herds.

"But Buck went back to the post, over thirty miles from our ranch, and was gone five days. He was going to bring in more ammunition, but when he came back he was drunk and had no ammunition, so I left him there and went after it.

"And I met this girl. Her name was Janice Gray. Pretty name, eh? And she was pretty. I found that Buck had proposed to her and she had turned him down. Two days later we were married and went back to the ranch."

Park Reber smiled bitterly and looked at the ceiling.

"I don't know why she married me, June. I can see the look on Buck's face yet when we rode in and told him. And I had forgotten the ammunition. He didn't say much. Didn't wish us happiness—just sat there and looked at the ground. Finally he said—

" 'Park, I'll pay you for this some day.'

"I didn't know what he meant at the time. He saddled his horse and rode away. Later on he built a cabin at the forks of the river and sent two men for half of the stock. I helped them round up all the cattle and horses, and we divided them equally.

"But he never came near me. I heard that he said he would pay me back for what I had done, but I did not pay any attention to what I heard. We were happy, Janice and I. The spring came and turned into summer. There were few settlers. The Cheyennes were gettin' worse, but every one said that when the winter came they'd be driven out by the deep snows and lack of game. The deer all move over to Clear Valley in the winter, because of the laurel, which does not grow here.

"The winter came early that season. I had cut a lot of wild hay on the bottoms, but not enough to feed stock all winter. In October there was three feet of snow, and it did not go off. By Christmas my hay was all gone, and I was in a desperate condition.

"I knew that the north end of the valley was open, and there was only one thing to try and do—to take my herd out of my range. I had one man working for me. He was a young man by the name of Sneed—John Sneed—a good boy. I couldn't leave Janice alone, yuh see. There would be a baby along soon, and some one had to stay with her. There was a doctor at the trading post. I tell yuh, I was desperate, so I broke trail with horses and led my cattle to the upper end of the valley. It was a tough pull. I took them past Buck's place, but didn't see him. He had moved his cattle out a few days before, and the trail was open from there.

"I had to bring those half-starved cattle almost up to here, where I threw them in with Buck's cattle, and came on to the post. It was bitter cold that night I rode in, but it warmed up a little, and by morning the worst blizzard that ever swept this country came down through here.

"This whole valley was a howling hell of wind and snow, June. I don't suppose our cattle lasted one night. You couldn't see a man at your elbow. A man couldn't live in it. Twenty below and a fifty-mile gale. I swore I'd go home, but they stopped me. It lasted five days.

"And when the wind died down the temperature died with it, until the thermometer at the post froze. Then we started for my place, the doctor and me, traveling on snowshoes. The valley was a place of the dead. There was not even a rabbit-track. Our cattle were under the drifts.

"There was some one at Buck's cabin. We could see a thread of smoke from his chimney; the rest of the cabin was buried in the snow. But there was no smoke from my chimney."

Park Reber shut his eyes, and for a while June thought he had fallen asleep. Then:

"No, there was no smoke, June; the cabin was empty. We dug our way down to the door and went in. There was John Sneed, lying face down in the middle of the room—dead. His head had been cut open—his scalp taken. The Cheyennes had been there. The doctor said he had been dead quite a while. I think they had been there ahead of the blizzard.

"I don't remember just what I did, June. They told me that I went hunting for the Cheyenne camp; I don't remember. Later I went back to the post and spent the winter. In the spring I went to the Cheyennes and tried to find some trace of my wife, but it was useless. They treated me like a crazy man—and I reckon I was. Later on I went further north and opened a saloon in a new mining camp. It was a money-maker, and in two years I came back here and went into cattle again.

"Buck was still here; still hatin' me. We met one day and he taunted me with my loss. I tried to kill him with my hands and almost succeeded. It didn't help any. Buck Priest ain't the kind you can whip into friendship.

"And I think he hates me for being successful. I own practically all of the Valley. They call it Reber's Valley. That must hurt Buck Priest. I tried to buy him out, but he wouldn't sell. He shot my cattle when they came on his range, and I—I shot his cattle on my range.

"Oh, it's been a battle for years. Finally I gave my men orders to let him and his cattle alone. It seemed to be a mutual truce. But my cattle have disappeared. I don't think Buck Priest took them."

"Who is Jack Silver?" asked June.

Reber looked curiously at her.

"Jack Silver?"

"Yes, I heard his name spoken, Mr. Reber."

"Jack Silver," mused Reber. "A handsome devil of a breed, June. He's tall, graceful—too smart for my men. He comes to Tomahawk. He's not afraid of me. Half Cheyenne. There are no Cheyeenes in the Valley now, June. Uncle Sam keeps 'em on a reservation. But Jack Silver lives back on Trapper Creek, twenty miles southwest of here. We've tried to catch him stealing my cattle, but he eludes us.

"McLeese of the Two-Bar X and Nort Jackson of the Lightnin' have trailed him for weeks; and Slim Patterson has tried to trap him, but he's too clever. He's got the cunning of the Cheyenne, the brain of a white man."

June sat in an old rocker, her chin resting on the palm of her right hand, as she thought over Reber's story. It was the first time she had ever heard the reasons for Buck Priest's hatred of Park Reber.

"How many head of cattle has Jack Silver stolen from you?" she asked.

Reber shook his head slowly.

"Who knows, June? More than I care to lose."

He smiled at the thoughtful expression on her face.

"What would you do if you was in my place, June?"

"I was just thinking," said June, "that if I were in your place I'd hire Jack Silver to work for me."

Reber frowned quickly. "Hire him to—"

"Why not? You'd save money—and he would be worth what you paid him, wouldn't he?"

"I never thought of that, June."

They were interrupted by Hop Lee, who came in and told Reber that Slim Patterson of the Half-Wheel was waiting to see him. June left the room when Patterson came in.

"How're yuh comin'?" asked Slim, sitting down in the chair June had vacated.

"All right," said Reber. "Be out in a day or so."

"Good! Say, I was back between Trapper Creek and the West Fork yesterday and I found about a hundred cows bunched in a draw back there. It shore looked as though somebody was all set for a drive. Me and 'Chuck' Avery laid there until night waitin' for somebody to show up, but they didn't.

"I left Chuck there and went home. Sent 'Biddy' Conley and Abe Lehman out to keep him company and pulled out for here this mornin', after Biddy came in and said they hadn't seen anybody yet."

Reber sighed wearily.

"I dunno, Slim," he said slowly. "I talked with McLeese the other day and he suggested that we post men in that Trapper Creek pass. It might be a good scheme. They can't get past the Two-Bar X into West Fork pass without bein' seen by some of the boys, and those are the only two ways out, except past here.

"I'll tell yuh what I want yuh to do, Slim. Send about three of yore men to Trapper Creek pass, and then pack a message to Jackson, McLeese, Franks and Carlin to be here at my place tomorrow night, and you come with 'em. I've got a scheme to stop Jack Silver."

"You have? That's fine."

Slim got to his feet and picked up his hat.

"I'll pass the word to the boys for tomorrow night. Heard anythin' more of Buck Priest?"

"Not a word, Slim. Have you?"

"Only that he says yo're stealin' his cows. I think he's tryin' to excuse himself for shootin' yuh."

Reber smiled slowly, and Slim went out.

THE S Bar P ranch-house and other buildings were of log construction, rambling old structures one story in height. The ranch-house and bunk-house had the old mud-and-stone fire-places. Back of the stables was Porcupine Creek, which ran northwest to Tomahawk River. It was about six miles from the ranch to Tomahawk town.

It was the day after Reber had sent the message to his foremen when Jack Silver rode in at the S Bar P ranch. He rode a tall black gelding, a fitting mount for a man of his physique.

Silver was tall, lithe, dark-skinned. He wore his hair long, but his face was smooth-shaven. His shirt was black, as were his muffler and sombrero, and he wore no chaps. His high-heeled boots were of the short-topped Southwest style, and around his waist was a hand-made cartridge belt supporting a Colt gun in a hand-made holster.

He swung off his horse, waving a greeting to three of Buck Priest's men who were down near the corrals. Priest met him at the door of the ranch-house and they shook hands warmly.

"How are yuh, Jack?" asked Priest, as they sat down in the main room of the ranch-house.

"I'm fine," replied Silver. "Been over in Clear Valley for a week and just got back. Ran into Dave McLeese yesterday and he told me about you and Reber havin' a fight."

Priest scowled heavily and slapped the palm of his right hand on his knee.

"I tried to kill him, Jack. A girl ruined the shot."

Silver smiled, showing a flash of white, even teeth.

"A girl, eh? McLeese didn't tell me about her."

"A fiddler in the Tomahawk," said Priest. "Flung her fiddle and hit me in the hand. Oh, I was goin' to kill him, Jack. Reber and his gang of cutthroats are runnin' all the S Bar P cattle out of the valley."

"I thought there was sort of a truce."

"Truce!" Priest laughed shortly. "Reber sent me word that he'd quit if I would. I quit, Jack. But he didn't. The only way I can ever make Park Reber quit is to kill him. Next time there won't be any fiddle-throwin' female present."

Jack Silver laughed softly.

"You know what they think of me, Buck. I'm watched every minute by Reber's men. Why, I can't even kill a piece of fresh meat any more. They're layin' for a chance to kill me. Some day they'll put up a job on me—and I'll swing for it.

"Oh, they're nice to my face—McLeese, Jim Carlin, Nort Jackson—all nice to my face. Behind my back they call me the dirty half-breed—the Injun rustler. I trap for a livin', Buck. You know that. Reber hates me because I'm half Cheyenne."

Buck Priest smiled crookedly, nodding slowly.

"There's plenty of hate in this valley, Jack. I hope some day to see Park Reber suffer."

"He ought to be half Injun," said Silver bitterly. "That's enough sufferin' for one man. Last night he sent word to me by one of the Half-Wheel punchers to be at his place tonight."

"He sent word to you?"

"Yeah."

"Wants to trap yuh, eh?"

Silver shrugged his shoulders.

"I played safe, Buck. Today I came across the hills and I'll stay here until dark. I don't know what Reber wants."

"He's still crippled, and that girl is nursin' him. She's makin' a play for Reber."

"Pretty girl, Buck?"

Priest nodded.

"Yeah, pretty as a picture. But what do yuh suppose Reber wants of you?"

"I dunno."

"Are you goin' to take a chance on him, Jack?"

"I'll see what he wants."

"It might be a scheme to harm yuh, Jack."

"Might be. But as far as that's concerned, if they want to kill me they can pick me off most any time."

"That's true," agreed Priest. "We'll all ride in after supper, Jack. If things go wrong, we'll do what we can."

"And if Reber finds you in town he'll set his dogs on yuh," said Silver grimly.

"I'll have my dogs along," replied Buck meaningly. "We went into the Tomahawk and came out safe enough. But I was drunk, Jack. It wasn't a job for a sober man. We sure shocked that gang a-plenty."

"I wish I had been there," smiled Jack. "I've never been in the Tomahawk."

"It's not a safe place, Jack; and maybe you'll find it out tonight."

NONE of Reber's foremen knew why he had sent for them. Some of them were obliged to ride the length of the valley, but they were all there—Patterson, Jackson, McLeese, Carlin and Franks. McLeese was drunk; not blind drunk by any manner of means, but inclined to be quarrelsome.

Park Reber was out of bed, and met them in the big living-room, a huge place forty feet long and twenty-five feet wide. Around two sides of this huge room was a wide veranda. At one end was a doorway leading out on to the veranda; and there was another doorway about fifteen feet from the corner, on the side. About midway of the room was a big window, and there were two windows at the front end.

Across this front end of the room was a long table and a number of chairs. On the opposite side of the room from the side entrance was a huge fireplace, capable of taking ten-foot logs. Most of the furnishings were of the home-made variety, and the floors were strewn with bright-colored Navajo rugs and the skins of wolf and grizzly. The walls were darkened with smoke and age.

The five foremen came in together. Reber seated them around the big table, he himself sitting at the head of the table, still a trifle pale, unable to use his left arm. At his right sat June Meline. She received several undisguised scowls. Beside her sat Franks of the M 33. At the opposite end of the table sat McLeese, scowling at everybody, and June in particular. He did not like the idea of having a woman at their conference. On the other side of the table sat Patterson, Jackson and Carlin.

Reber's glance swept around the table and came to rest on McLeese.

"You're drunk," he said shortly. "Why?"

McLeese grimaced and tried to laugh it off, but Reber's eyes bored into him and he coughed a little.

"I wanted sober men at this meetin'," said Reber.

"I'm sober enough to know what I'm doin'," said McLeese.

"Not if you had three drinks—and you've had more."

Reber did not wait for McLeese to reply, but turned to the others.

"I brought you boys here tonight to see if we can't figure out some way to stop this rustlin'," he said slowly. "We're losin' too many cattle to suit me. What's to be done?"

Patterson shook his head.

"I dunno, Park," he said slowly. "It beats me."

"How about you, Jackson?"

"Same as Slim."

"Same here," growled Carlin.

"They ain't hit my place," said Franks of the M 33. "Mebbe I'm too far north."

"That may be," nodded Reber. "But it's got to stop."

"Go out and stop old Buck Priest," said McLeese.

Reber studied McLeese's flushed face.

"You think they're runnin' 'em out this end of the valley, Mac?"

"Priest hates yuh, don't he? They're not goin' over the West Fork pass, and the boys have been watchin' the Trapper Creek pass. Jack Silver is friendly to Buck Priest. By —— I'd wipe out that whole —— gang."

"There's a lady present," said Reber coldly.

"I forgot," said McLeese. "Anyway, I don't think this is any place for a woman."

"I asked her to be here," said Reber. "When I want yore opinion on that I'll ask for it, McLeese!"

"I'm jist wonderin' if McLeese's idea ain't worth quite a lot, at that," said Jackson. "I don't mean about the lady, but about Priest and Silver. We've tried to trap Silver a lot of times, but he's too much Injun to be trapped."

"He's smart," said McLeese.

"Too smart for you, eh?" asked Reber.

"Oh, I dunno," flared McLeese.

"You haven't landed him, and that's the answer," said Reber. "He's too smart. He thinks twice while you're thinkin' once. And you object to this lady being here. She's got more sense in a minute than you'll ever show, McLeese."

Both June and McLeese flushed, but for different reasons.

The rest of the men eyed June closely. Perhaps they thought Reber was getting old and that this pretty girl was in a position to get a hand into the Reber fortune. It was an embarrassing position for the girl. McLeese laughed, and they saw Reber's lips tighten. Carlin kicked at McLeese's ankle beneath the table, but only succeeded in kicking a leg of the table.

"We're not gettin' anywhere," said Reber coldly.

"No, and we'll not get anywhere as long as you'll let Jack Silver and Buck Priest do as they please," growled Carlin. "Let's clean 'em out, I say."

"On what evidence, Carlin?"

"General principles. Buck tried to kill you. He'll try it again. Silver is a half-breed thief. Just pass the word and we'll rid the valley of the whole brood."

"Meanin'," said Reber slowly, "that Silver is too smart for you to catch red-handed, eh?"

"If yuh want to put it that way—yes."

"You think he bunches up cattle and takes 'em through the Trapper Creek pass and sells 'em in Clear Valley?"

"Cinch. We can't get any evidence in Clear Valley. We've tried it often enough."

"That gang over there will take stolen cattle, that's a cinch," said Jackson. "You'd never get any evidence if yuh went there in a gang—and one or two men would soon be wiped out. They're pretty clannish."

Reber nodded slowly. He knew Jackson was right. Suddenly there came the slither of a moving body, and they turned toward the big window about ten feet beyond them. Just inside the window stood Jack Silver, his left shoulder resting against the wall, his two thumbs hooked over his belt.

For several moments no one spoke. Silver laughed, and his teeth flashed white in the light from the hanging lamp in the center of the room. He seemed to be resting lazily against that shoulder, but every man at that table knew he could draw and shoot quicker than any of them.

"Gentlemen, Mr. Silver himself," said Reber slowly.

The men glanced at Reber curiously, but turned back to Silver.

"You sent for me," said Jack.

Reber nodded.

"Yeah, I sent for yuh, Silver. Slim, will you get a chair for Mr. Silver?"

Slim Patterson started to get up, but Silver halted him.

"I'll stand up," he said slowly, smiling again. "Since when did the Reber outfits start havin' squaws at their council?"

June straightened in her chair, her eyes flashing. Silver's laugh was almost an insult. Reber did not look at her. McLeese grinned in evident enjoyment.

"Silver," said Reber firmly, "you're deliberately tryin' to antagonize us, but I'll overlook it. I asked you here tonight to make you a proposition. Will you go to work for me as a foreman on one of my ranches?"

It was like a bomb-shell exploding in the room. The idea of offering Jack Silver a position as foreman! The men wondered whether Reber was losing his mind. Even Silver laughed.

"Make me a foreman?" said Silver. "What's the idea, Reber?"

"That's my business, Silver. I'm makin' you that offer."

Silver's eyes swept the faces of the five foremen.

"Which ranch?" he asked smiling.

"Any one you'll take."

Silver's amused glance came back to June.

"Which one is the squaw goin' to take?"

Reber shook his head sadly.

"You don't understand what I'm offerin' you, Silver."

"Yes, I do, Reber."

Silver was not smiling now and he had shoved away from the wall.

"You're tryin' to buy me off—tryin' to get me to work for you. You're afraid of me, Reber. I dunno why, but yuh are. Your men watch me day and night. I'm tired of it, but not so tired that I'll take a job with you. You hate me because I'm half Cheyenne.

"You ran my people out of Tomahawk Valley, Reber. I know your story—know why you hate my people. I had a little herd of cattle started, but you and your men killed 'em off to keep me from being a cattleman. I've no cause to love you. I don't want your job. Give it to the squaw."

He flung his left leg across the window-sill, and before any one could say anything further, he disappeared. Patterson sprang to his feet, and the other men were behind him, but Reber stopped them.

"Sit down," he ordered. "He's done no wrong."

"The dirty half-breed!" snarled McLeese.

June Meline was on her feet, her hands on the table, as she leaned forward, staring at the window where Silver had disappeared. He had taunted her, called her a squaw! But there was something romantically wild about this tall, slim, white-toothed young man who defied them. He had laughed at them and refused to work for Park Reber.

"The trouble is," Reber was speaking, "yo're all afraid of Jack Silver."

June turned quickly to Reber.

"I'm not," she declared.

Reber smiled at her.

"You're not, June?"

"Not a bit. I'll bet I could trap him."

Several of the men laughed aloud.

"He'd steal you," declared McLeese, and then laughed at his own statement.

"You think you could, eh?" said Reber slowly. "I wonder."

"Ridiculous," declared Jackson.

Reber leaned on the table looking at June, studying her keenly. Suddenly he struck the table with his clenched fist.

"I'll do it!" he exclaimed. "June, beginnin' tomorrow you'll be a ranch-foreman for the Diamond R."

He looked around at the hard-bitted faces of his men, who were looking at him, wondering whether he was in his right mind.

"What ranch?" asked McLeese.

Reber shifted his eyes to McLeese.

"The Two Bar X."

McLeese's ranch. He shut his jaws tightly and looked at Reber. He knew it meant that Reber was going to fire him.

"That's a —— of a note!" he snorted.

"I run my ranches to suit myself, McLeese."

Reber reached in his pocket and took out a wallet, from which he counted out several bills. He handed them to McLeese.

"That's yore pay up to the first of the month, McLeese."

"And I'm through right now, eh?"

"Yeah, right now."

"All right," McLeese got to his feet unsteadily. "I've got some personal stuff at the ranch and I'll go get it."

Reber nodded, and they watched McLeese leave the house. None of the other men made any comment. For several moments after McLeese was gone Reber stared silently at the door. Then:

"I think that's all boys. Goodnight."

He got to his feet and June walked from the room with him. The men looked curiously at him, and went out.

"I need a shot of liquor," said Patterson dryly. "Personally, I think the old man is losin' his mind."

"He's as crazy as a bedbug!" snapped Carlin. "Offers a job to Jack Silver, and then gives it to a —— woman! I'll take a drink with yuh."

PARK REBER wanted to go with June to the Two Bar X ranch the next day, but the old doctor vetoed such a move on the part of his patient. Reber was far from well. There was none of his men in from the ranches, so he sent Jud Nelson and Sam Heard, two of his men who worked in Tomahawk, to accompany June.

These men did not know why June was going to the ranch, nor did they ask Reber. They loaded June and her baggage into a light wagon, kicked off the brake and drove out of town. It was nearly thirty miles to the Two Bar X, and the roads were none too good. June occupied the back seat, and with the rattle and lurch of the vehicle there was little opportunity for conversation. The two men devoted themselves exclusively to chewing tobacco and keeping the wagon on the road.

At the forks of the river, about twelve miles south of town, they saw Slim Patterson and two of his cowboys. The road passed close to the Half-Wheel ranchhouse. Slim waved at them, but they did not stop. They took the right-hand road, which led to the Two Bar X. There were no bridges, and the river crossings were almost deep enough to float the wagon.

About three miles south of the Half-Wheel ranch they passed the mouth of Trapper Creek. One of the men told her it was Trapper Creek, and she knew that Jack Silver's place was somewhere between the West Fork and the mountains.

June was still in somewhat of a daze over her new job. She didn't know a thing about cattle; she knew nothing about running a ranch. But Reber had told her merely to use her head. He was the real head of all the ranches, and he would see that she learned the game. Not that Reber intended keeping her at the Two Bar X. He was not crazy. But he was willing to grasp at any straw to stop the cattle rustling. If June could figure out a way to trap Silver it would be worth many dollars to the Diamond R and he was going to give her a chance.

He knew the temper of his men, knew that the majority of them were against the idea of hiring a woman. But he did feel that any of them would support any scheme she might formulate to stop the wholesale stealing of his cattle.

They had just passed the mouth of Trapper Creek and were traveling through a willow patch in the river bottom, near a ford, when the driver suddenly jerked up his team, almost throwing June off the seat. She had a confused impression of the team's twisting sidewise, of a man yelling a warning, of the sound of a shot.

She flung out her right hand, grasping the back of the front seat to steady herself. Sam Herd was sprawling forward, as if looking down over the left front wheel, and he suddenly slid ahead limply and slithered over the wheel to the ground.

Jud Nelson's two hands were in the air. Two masked men had turned their horses in close to the wagon. They were wearing empty flour sacks over their heads, with holes cut in them for eyes. One of them looked down at Herd.

"That's one less for Reber," he growled behind his mask.

The one man kept a rifle trained on Nelson, while the other dismounted, climbed up and removed Nelson's revolver.

June's face was pale, but she kept her nerve when this masked man turned to her.

"Git out of the wagon," he ordered gruffly.

There was nothing else for her to do. These men had killed one man already. She climbed down and he indicated his horse.

"Climb on."

She looked at Nelson, who was looking straight ahead, his lips compressed tightly, both hands held rigidly above his head. June could ride. She climbed into the saddle, hampered by her skirts, and the other bandit laughed.

"Good lookin' squaw," he observed.

The other man turned and walked around the wagon to where Herd's body lay. He picked him up, carried him to the rear of the wagon and dumped him unceremoniously over the tailgate into the wagon-box. He came back and motioned to Nelson.

"Turn around and drive back," he said hoarsely. "Take all the time yuh need. A little hurry might ruin yore health."

"And yuh might tell old Reber that he ain't runnin' this valley yet a while," added the other. "The road from here to Tomahawk won't be healthy for him and his men, so they don't need to blame us if they git what this feller got."

Nelson nodded. He was more than willing to get away with a whole skin. He managed to turn the team around in the willows, and started back, holding the team to a slow walk.

The man mounted behind June, but before they started out he blindfolded her with a none too clean handkerchief.

Then they rode out of the river-bottom, forded the river and headed into the hills. June knew this, because the horse was climbing most of the way. There was no conversation. The bandit guided the horse, with an arm on each side of June. He had been drinking, but not enough to give him more than a whisky breath.

It seemed to June that they had been riding about an hour, when the horses fairly slid downward for considerable distance, traveled along for a while on level ground and stopped. The men dismounted and lifted June off the saddle, guiding her into a cabin, where they removed the blindfold.

It was a small log cabin, crudely furnished, with a dirt floor. It smelled musty in there. June blinked painfully as she looked around at the two men. One of them secured a length of lariat-rope with which he roped her tightly to a chair. He knew how to knot ropes, and when he was finished there was no possible way for June to escape. The other man inspected the knots and nodded his approval.

"That's the old Injun knot," he growled. "No squaw ever wiggled loose from one like that."

The other laughed.

"You'll stay here quite a while," he told June. "No use to yelp. There ain't a man within miles of here. When Jack Silver does a job, he does it well. Park Reber can hunt and be —— to him, but he'll never find yuh. We're goin' away, but we'll be back tonight some time and bring some feed for yuh."

They turned abruptly and left the cabin, closing the door behind them. June heard the creak of their saddles and the sound of the horses walking away. She tried to loosen her bonds, but she soon found that there was nothing to do but to sit and wait.

She wanted to cry, to scream for help. But she knew that it would not help matters in the least. She was going to need all her nerve. She wondered what Park Reber would do. What could he do, she wondered? It might take them weeks to find her. Jack Silver had outwitted him again.

She wondered whether one of these men was Silver. Neither looked like the man who had taunted her. They were not so tall and slim as Silver.

It was, possibly, thirty minutes after the departure of the two men when she heard the soft *plop-plop* of a horse's hoofs. She listened intently. The horse had stopped near the cabin door, and she heard a footstep.

Suddenly the door was flung open and a man stood in the opening—a tall, slender man. She was looking against the light and could not see his features, but she knew it was Jack Silver.

He came slowly in and stood looking down at her.

"Reber's squaw, eh?" he said softly.

June shut her lips tightly, refusing to reply. He walked back to the door and looked around. Beyond him she could see his tall black horse looking toward him. Finally he came back to her and began taking off the ropes.

It did not take him long to unfasten her hands, and then he dropped to his knees beside her, fumbling with the knots beneath the chair. It was her big chance, and she had the nerve to take advantage of it.

Leaning slightly toward him she reached

down and quickly whipped the six-shooter from his holster and shoved the muzzle against his neck. June knew guns. The hammer came to full cock from a twist of her thumb.

Jack Silver did not look up, but his hands came away from the rope. He did not move, but waited for her to act.

"Unfasten that rope," she ordered, and was surprized to find her voice fairly steady.

Silver unfastened the remaining rope, and she got to her feet, backing away from him.

"Now I've got you," she said hoarsely.

"Looks thataway," he said slowly. "I hope yuh know that trigger only pulls about a pound."

"I am not interested in trigger pulls, Mr. Silver."

"Possibly not. I am."

June picked up the loose rope with her left hand, keeping an eye on Silver, and then motioned for him to precede her out of the cabin. He made no objection, but his eyes were just a little curious.

June tossed him the looped end of the rope.

"Put it around your neck," she ordered.

He shut his lips tightly and studied her intently. She had the gun at her hip now, and the hammer was still cocked. He shrugged his shoulders and smiled thinly.

"Single-handed lynchin'?" he asked.

June shook her head firmly.

"I'm not your judge, Jack Silver. But you're going to guide me to the Two Bar X ranch, you know. You'll walk ahead with the rope around your neck and I'll ride your horse."

Jack Silver laughed softly as he put the loop around his neck.

"So that's your game, eh?" he said amusedly. "You've got a lot of nerve for a woman. I never knew that pretty women had nerve. That's how yuh won old man Reber, eh? Pretty girl with plenty nerve. Oh, he's worth winnin'. He's got nobody to leave his money to—no relatives. And he's got plenty money. I heard he had made you a foreman."

Silver threw back his head and laughed. June had a notion to yank the loop tight and choke off that laugh.

"You'll laugh different when I get you to the Two Bar X," she promised him.

He sobered suddenly.

"That's right," he said quickly. "They don't like me. But what I'd like to know is what you were doing in this cabin all tied up like that?"

"How did you know I was in that cabin?" she retorted.

"I didn't. I saw two men riding away from here, so I came to investigate. Where most men are my enemies, I kinda look at things, yuh know."

"You lie!"

Silver's eyes narrowed with sudden anger.

"You know you lie," said June hotly. "You and your men knew I was going to the Two Bar X today. You had them stop us, and they killed a man—Sam Herd. You had them bring me to this place. That's how you knew I was here. Now I'm going to take you to the Two Bar X and turn you over to the men. You're responsible for the death of Sam Herd, and if Park Reber's men don't hang you the law will!"

Silver turned his head away and stared off across the hills.

"Your men won't be back for quite a while so you don't need to look for them," said June. "How far is it to the Two Bar X?"

"About three miles," said Silver slowly. "You better let the hammer down on that gun before yuh mount. Don't be afraid of that horse—he's gentle enough. Compadre! Stand still and let the squaw get on."

June managed to get into the saddle without tangling up the rope. She did not dare take her eyes off Silver, and she did not uncock the revolver. June was taking no chances.

"Now you take me straight to the Two Bar X ranch," she ordered, "and don't try any tricks."

"You are a very, very smart young lady," he said seriously. "And I am not going to try and trick yuh."

ABOUT the time that June and Jack Silver were leaving for the Two Bar X ranch, a rider came through the gate of the S Bar P; a rider who swayed down along the fork of his saddle, a limp arm hanging on each side of the horse's neck.

The rider was Harry O'Steen, one of Buck Priest's men — a red-headed, freckled cowboy; a laughing, rollicking sort of person, whose disposition did much to keep up the morale of the S Bar P.

Buck Priest was sitting on the ranch-house porch talking with "Rowdy" Dow, another of his cowboys, when the horse came in. They could see at a glance that O'Steen had been hurt, and both of them ran down to him. They eased him to the ground and then carried him to the shade of the porch.

"Been shot twice," declared Rowdy. "Gawd A'mighty, he's all shot to strings!"

Buck Priest nodded shortly and knelt beside O'Steen, who was trying to talk. Rowdy ran through the house and came back with a dipper of water, which he held to O'Steen's lips. Ken Mader and Dick Leeson, the two other cowboys, came from the bunk-house and joined them.

"Can yuh talk, Harry?" asked Buck anxiously. "Who shot yuh?"

O'Steen struggled painfully, trying to say something. It came in a jerky sentence—

"Rustlers — got — me — Porcupine — Creek—"

That was all. He closed his eyes, twitched slightly. Buck got to his feet, his old face twisted.

"Uh-huh," he said softly. "Rustlers got him on Porcupine Creek, boys. Help me carry him in the house. That's more of Park Reber's work."

They placed the body of O'Steen on a cot and covered it up with a bright-colored blanket.

"Saddle up," ordered Priest. "Take yore rifles along. We're goin' to Tomahawk and talk to Park Reber with the only language he understands. He's goin' to pay for killin' O'Steen."

"That's the talk," said Rowdy. "We'll wipe his town off the map."

"Four men may not be able to do that, Rowdy," said Buck Priest wearily, "but we'll do what we can."

Ten minutes later the four men galloped from the S Bar P, heading for Tomahawk town. The sun was almost down, and they wanted to get there before dark. About two miles from the ranch the road intersected with the main road, and as the four riders swept around the point of a hill they saw a team and light wagon coming from the south.

They were close enough to see that the driver was Nelson, one of Reber's men. They drew rein and waited for the wagon to reach them. Priest swung his horse across the road ahead of the team, forcing them to stop.

"Hyah, Nelson," said Priest coldly.

"Howdy, gentlemen," nodded Nelson. "I'm sure glad to see somebody. I stopped at the Half-Wheel, but there wasn't nobody at home. Me and Sam Herd was takin' that girl to the Two Bar X and we got held up. Sam tried to draw a gun, and they killed him. And they put the girl on a horse and took her away. Sam's in the back of the wagon."

Rowdy spurred his horse around the wagon and looked in.

"He's here all right, Buck," he said.

"Where'd this all happen?"

"Near the mouth of Trapper. Down in them willers, jist before yuh reach the ford. Two men, Priest. They had sacks over their heads."

Priest backed his horse off the road and motioned for Nelson to drive on.

"Ain't we goin'?" asked Rowdy.

Buck Priest watched the wagon disappear up the road.

"I don't know what to make of it," he said. "Sam Herd was one of Park Reber's trusted men. And they stole that girl, eh? That's funny. We're goin' back home, boys. No use goin' off half-cocked, I reckon. We'll pack up some grub and blankets and swing in on the Porcupine. It must have been kinda late when

O'Steen was shot, and the rustlers can't move cattle much after dark."

They turned and rode back to the ranch.

IN THE meantime Nelson lost no time in driving his jaded horses to Tomahawk town. It was dark when he arrived, and he went straight to Reber's house, where he found Reber with the old doctor. Nelson blurted out his story as quickly as possible. He helped the doctor carry Herd's body into the house, and the doctor found that Herd had been killed almost instantly.

Reber, still weak from his wound, sat down in a chair and swore impotently.

"Just for that I'll wipe Buck Priest and Jack Silver off the map," he declared bitterly. "You say you met Priest and his men? They circled back to see if you got help at the Half-Wheel. Oh, I know Buck Priest!"

"Only one of 'em looked in at the body," said Nelson.

"They knew it was there. Oh, I'll make Priest pay. It was either Priest or Silver—perhaps both. They work together. Nelson, go to the Tomahawk and see if any of my men are in from the ranches. Bring them here to me. Wait! Send them here. You get a horse and ride for the Half-Wheel. Don't spare the horse. Tell Slim Patterson what happened. Then you go to the Circle S and tell Jim Carlin to bring his outfit to the Half-Wheel and to send a man to the Lightnin' for Jackson and his crew. We'll all meet at the Half-Wheel."

Nelson ran from the house, and the old doctor turned to Reber.

"You'll not ride tonight," he said firmly.

"You try to stop me, Doc."

"Hm-m-m-m! You're a fool, Park. That wound isn't healed up. You'll wreck your health, I tell you."

"Bah! Wreck my health! I'm goin' out to find that girl and to whip all this scum out of the valley. I've stood all I'll ever stand from Priest and Silver."

"It was a foolish thing, that sending of a woman," said the old doctor. He had known Park Reber for years, and felt privileged to speak his mind.

"Mebbe," said Reber shortly. "Mebbe not. She's smart, Doc. I wish she was my daughter. If things had turned out different I might have had a girl or a boy of about her age."

"Yes, that's true."

"And she spoiled Buck Priest's shot," said Reber. "He's got no love for her. I wonder where these men would take her? Not to any known place, that's a cinch. She's their ace in the hole. I'd like to get my two hands around Buck Priest's throat and choke the truth from him. Oh, he hates me, Doc!

"When he looks at me with his lop-sided grin, I feel that he's gloating over somethin'."

"Be calm," advised the doctor. "You'll work yourself into a fever. Did any doctor ever have such a patient to contend with? That meeting almost ruined everything; and now you insist on getting excited and riding helter-skelter over the hills in the dark! I ought to tie you down."

"Here come some of my men," said Reber. "Now you keep your tongue out of it, Doc. I'm goin', if I have to go on a stretcher."

IT WAS almost dark when Jack Silver led the way to the Two Bar X. There were no lights in the ranch-house. June dismounted and forced Jack to knock on the door. But there was no answer to his knock. The door was unlocked. Without any orders from June, Jack lighted the big lamp in the main room.

"Where is everybody?" wondered June. "Is this the Two Bar X?"

"It's the Two Bar X all right," said Jack.

His heels were sore from the long walk in high-heeled boots and he limped painfully.

June pointed at a door across the room.

"Open that," she ordered.

Jack limped over and opened it.

It was a windowless inside room, evidently used as a bedroom by some one who cared little for ventilation. There was a small lamp on the table, and June ordered Jack to light it. She told him to remove the rope, and then she backed into the main room, closing the door behind her.

At some time the room must have been used for storage purposes, because there was a hasp and staple fastener. June quickly locked the door, after which she sat down in a chair and drew the first calm breath she had taken since Jack Silver had entered the deserted cabin. There was no way for him to get out of that room. She took a small lamp and went on a tour of investigation. The kitchen was fairly clean and there was plenty of food.

She cooked a meal for herself, but was afraid to take any of it to Silver. She had him under lock and intended keeping him. She felt sure that the men of the Two Bar X would be coming back soon. Perhaps, she thought, they heard of what happened to her and were searching for her.

And what a surprize it would be for them to come back and find her there, and to find Jack Silver a prisoner. She washed the dishes and went back to the main room. It was very quiet. A new moon was peeping over the crest of the Tomahawk range, and she heard the distant howling of a coyote.

She put Jack Silver's gun on the table beside her and sat down to look at some old magazines. Suddenly she heard the muffled tread of horses walking and thought it was the boys of the ranch coming home. She ran to a front window and looked out, but could see no one.

For several minutes she stood at the window, but the half-light was baffling. She went back and sat down, after deciding that it had been some loose horses. But something made her feel that she was being watched. Perhaps it was sort of sixth sense.

She found herself unable to read. The two dull, uncurtained windows seemed to stare at her like a pair of eyes. Why didn't they curtain their windows, she wondered? There were noises, too—queer noises.

Suddenly there came the scrape of leather sole on the porch, and the door was flung open. June jerked forward, her hand on the big gun.

Two men stepped inside, looking queerly at her. It was McLeese, the deposed foreman, and Chuck Bell, a big, rawboned, square-faced cowboy who worked for the Two Bar X. McLeese glanced at the hand and gun on the table.

"Yuh got here, eh?" he said easily. "That's fine. I was kinda late gettin' here for my stuff. Where's all the boys?"

"I don't know," said June. "I haven't been here long."

"Uh-huh," nodded McLeese. "I suppose they're late gettin' in. Well, I'll gather up my stuff and head back for town. Did yuh come out alone?"

"Two men brought me," said June.

She didn't want to tell McLeese anything, because she didn't trust him.

"And went back and left yuh alone, eh? Dirty trick. This is a lonesome place for a girl, Miss Meline. If yuh want us to, we'll stay until the boys come back."

"No, I'm all right," said June. "I'm not afraid."

"Uh-huh."

McLeese went past her and entered the kitchen, where she heard him working around. Chuck Bell came over near the table and sat down in a chair. He began rolling a smoke. June was entirely disarmed. She took her hand away from the gun and picked up a magazine.

As quick as a flash Bell jerked sidewise out of his chair and secured the gun. He leered at June as he shoved the gun inside the waist-band of his overalls.

"All set, Mac," he called. McLeese came from the kitchen, glanced quickly toward the table and laughed throatily.

"That's better than knockin' her on the head," he said. "By golly, she had me worried for a minute. I don't *sabe* it yet, but that don't worry me much. Get a rope, Bell."

Bell walked back to the front door and went out, while McLeese leaned against the table and leered at June.

"Smart little lady, eh? Made a awful hit with Old Man Reber, didn't yuh? Came out here to catch Jack Silver!"

McLeese laughed scornfully. Bell came in with the rope and gave it to McLeese, who lost no time in tying June's hands and feet securely.

"Find me a handkerchief or a rag," he said. "We'd better gag her. Yuh never can tell who might come along. The road is guarded and all that, but we'll jist play safe."

Bell produced a dirty bandanna handkerchief.

"Why don'tcha find out how much she knows, Mac?" he asked.

"Whatsa use? Anyway, we've got to get goin', Chuck. Old Man Reber won't stop to ask many questions."

McLeese twisted the handkerchief, forced June's teeth apart and tied the gag. As he was finishing the job, Bell examined the gun he had taken from her. Suddenly he cried out:

"This is Jack Silver's gun!"

"What're yuh talkin' about?" asked McLeese.

"I tell yuh it is, Mac! There's the S carved on the bottom of the handle. I've seen it lots of times. Where do you suppose she got it?"

McLeese looked at June, who was none too comfortable with the gag between her teeth.

"Take that rag out and let her talk," suggested Bell, but McLeese shook his head.

"She'd lie about it, anyway."

He indicated the closed door, where June had locked Silver.

"We'll put her in there, Chuck. Grab her feet."

McLeese grasping her by the shoulders and Chuck Bell taking her feet, they carried her over to the door.

McLeese did not seem to think it strange that the hasp was fastened in place. He held June with one arm while he unfastened it. He grasped her again with both hands and kicked the door open.

And as the door flew open, something in the nature of a cyclone seemed to strike them. Jack Silver sprang from inside the room, striking Chuck Bell with his shoulder.

June's feet struck the floor heavily, and McLeese jerked away, letting her fall to the floor as Chuck Bell went spinning across the room. Jack went to his hands and knees, but was up like a flash and into the startled McLeese before he could draw a gun.

He swung a right hand at McLeese's jaw, but the blow was too high. It caught McLeese on the bridge of the nose and knocked him to his haunches against the wall. Silver turned quickly to meet the rush of Chuck Bell, and they grappled. It was evident that Bell was so dizzy from his spinning that he forgot to draw a gun; but not so McLeese. He sagged back, his broken nose painting his face with gore, and whipped out his gun and fired upward at Silver.

The report of the gun was echoed by a crash of glass, and the room was plunged in darkness. McLeese's bullet had smashed the lamp, missing Jack Silver's ear by a fraction of an inch.

Silver whirled Bell around, broke his hold and flung him toward McLeese. It was evident that Bell went down on top of McLeese, and Silver feared for the safety of June, who was only a few feet from McLeese.

He stepped in and tried to drag her out of the mêlée, but at that moment one of the men crashed into him, knocking him off his feet. He went rolling against the table, and a man fell over him. Silver struggled to his feet and met the rush of one of them.

In that darkness it was impossible for him to see which one it was. They crashed to the floor, fighting like a pair of animals, but Jack managed to tear himself away and slid along the floor.

The front door opened, and for a moment he could see the silhouette of a man, etched blackly against the moonlight.

Came the crashing report of a revolver in the room, and the silhouette sagged down heavily.

The flash of the gun had blinded Silver, and the powder smoke choked him. One of these men had shot the other, thinking it was Jack Silver. He heard this man crawling across the floor, but did not try to stop him. Then he heard him run through the kitchen, slam the door shut and go running across the yard.

Silver ran to the front door. The man who had left the house mounted his horse and spurred toward the gate. Silver turned the man over in the doorway, and the white face and staring eyes of McLeese looked up at him. He found McLeese's gun where he had dropped it on the porch, and went back in the house. He secured the lamp in the kitchen, lighted it and went into the main room.

June was still lying where they had dropped her. Silver closed the front door and came back to her. It was a simple task for him to take the gag and ropes off her and help her to a chair, where she sagged wearily. The gag had cut her lips, and there was blood on her wrists, cut by the ropes.

Silver said nothing. His face was bruised and one sleeve of his shirt was almost torn off. June stared at him, panting nervously, as he calmly rolled a cigaret with steady fingers.

"Why don't you say something?" she asked, almost hysterically.

He looked at her, a half-smile on his lips.

"I dunno," he said simply. "Don't seem to be much to say."

"Well, what is it all about? Oh, why don't you get excited? You sit there and roll a cigaret just as though nothing had happened. Who—which one did you shoot?"

"I didn't shoot," he said slowly. "Bell shot McLeese. Mebbe he thought it was me. He didn't have any cause to shoot Mac, that I know about. The door over there was too thick for me to hear much that was said, and I'm wonderin' why they had you tied up."

June shook her head. She didn't know.

"Didn't they tell yuh why?"

"Oh, I don't know what they talked about. Everything is so mixed up."

"Yeah, that's right."

He lighted his cigaret and inhaled deeply.

"It seems to me," he said smiling quietly, "that you've kinda had a hard time gettin' started on yore new job."

"Why did you have me kidnaped?" she asked.

"Me? Lord love yuh, I never did."

"I'd like to believe you, but—"

"Why should I?"

"Well, I—I—you hate Park Reber."

"Yo're not Park Reber."

"I—I work for him."

"Lotsa folks work for him, ma'am, and I never kidnaped any of them."

June bit her lip and studied Jack Silver, who looked at her frankly. He did not look like a man who would kidnap a woman. There was nothing of the sneak about him.

"What do you do for a living?" she asked bluntly.

"Trappin', mostly. I had a small herd of cattle a few years ago, but Park Reber's men killed 'em off. He didn't want me to get a start. In the winter I trap from here over into the Clear Valley side of the range. I make a good livin'."

"What do you do with the cattle you steal from Park Reber?"

It was a very blunt question. Jack Silver's eyes did not shift, but narrowed slightly, and for several moments he did not speak. Then—

"I've never stolen a cow from Park Reber."

"That doesn't check up with what I've heard, Mr. Silver."

"Probably not, ma'am, but it doesn't matter. I've eaten Diamond R beef. He killed off my cattle, didn't he? When I needed a piece of beef real bad, I took it. Reber hates me. He says he hates me because I steal his cattle, but he's a liar."

"Is it because he wants all the valley?"

"No, it's because I've got Cheyenne

blood in me. You've heard his story?"

"About the Indians killing his wife?"

"Stealin' her, ma'am. Nobody knows how she died—if she did die."

"I'm sorry," said June simply.

"About my blood?" Silver smiled bitterly. "I can't help it."

He got to his feet and walked to a window and he looked out. Finally he came back and sat down.

"I don't see where your blood would make any difference," said June.

"Don't yuh? Yo're a white woman; would you marry a half-breed?"

"Why, I—I never thought of that."

"You wouldn't. Perhaps there are white women who would, but they'd not be the kind I'd want. I don't want to marry an Injun girl—so there yuh are. I'm only half good enough to marry a white woman, and I've got too much white blood to marry an Indian. Everybody hates a breed. Oh, yes they do. Even the Injuns hate a breed.

"Do yuh know what they say about a half-breed? They say he inherits the vices of both sides and the virtues of neither. Mebbe that's right."

"What about Buck Priest—did Reber steal his cattle?"

"I think so, ma'am. But this ain't lettin' us in on the secret of things. Why do yuh suppose McLeese and Bell tied you up. Who kidnapped yuh, and what was their object? I'm gettin' kinda anxious. Bell rode away, and he might come back in force. I'd hate to have yuh penned in here with me if Reber's men try to catch me. I've got my own gun and the one McLeese had. If Reber found me here with you he'd hang me—especially if he found McLeese dead on the porch."

"Then you'd better go away," said June. "I can get along all right, I guess."

"I guess yuh can't. After them fellers tied yuh up and tried to lock yuh in that room? We'll find a horse to ride and I'll take yuh over to my place. At least you'll be safe over there."

June shook her head quickly.

"No, I'll stay here."

"Then I'll stay with yuh."

"And get hung for being here?"

"Mebbe. I'd sure hate myself all the rest of my life if I left yuh here alone and anythin' happened to yuh."

"Why would you care?"

"I'm half white."

"And you'd do this, even after I forced you to lead me here with a rope around your neck."

"That wasn't anythin'. You didn't pull it tight," he smiled at her and went to the front door.

"We've got to kinda make this place bull-tight," he said. "Yore name's June, ain't it? I heard it was. I'll call yuh June. It's easier to say than ma'am. My name's Jack. Prob'ly be mud before mornin'."

"Mr. Reber will come looking for me," said June.

"Yea-a-ah, and he'll find me," laughed Jack. "But I've got a hunch that Mr. Reber is goin' to have a hard time gettin' here."

"They spoke about the road being guarded. Did they mean against Mr. Reber?"

"Might be. We'll just wait and see what happens."

BUCK PRIEST and his men went back to the ranch and packed two horses with blankets and enough food to last them several days. It was about dark when they headed southeast toward the Porcupine hills. Priest's idea was to travel along the Porcupine for a way and then turn south toward the Circle S.

As far as he knew there had been no misbranding of cattle. Therefore he was of the opinion that the rustlers were moving a bunch of his stock toward the West Fork pass. If Park Reber were stealing cattle, that was the pass he would take them through to Clear Valley.

There was just enough moonlight to enable them to see to travel by, Buck hoped to find the rustler's camp, but after traveling far along the Porcupine he decided to head toward the Half-Wheel, which was almost due west of where they were now. He reasoned that if the rustlers knew that O'Steen had escaped wounded they would possibly drop the herd and head for the Half-Wheel.

In the meantime Park Reber had gathered a dozen riders and was also heading down the valley. Nelson had told him what the two masked men had said about the road's being dangerous, and Reber was not the man not to heed a warning. He left the road a short distance out of Tomahawk and took to the open hills where there would be no danger of an ambush.

"We'll head straight toward Jack Silver's place," he told his men. "Buck Priest is in with Silver on this deal, that's a cinch, so there's no use going to his place."

"And if it's a scheme to run a lot of cattle out of the valley they'll use the Trapper Creek pass," declared Nelson. "I'd like to notch my sight on the jasper that killed old Sam Herd."

"There'll be plenty of chances before this time tomorrow night," said Reber. "I'll clean this valley of every rustler or quit the cow business myself."

The men knew the hills well, and they were able to make good time. Reber was suffering considerably with his shoulder, but he gritted his teeth and led the way.

There were no lights showing at the Half-Wheel when Buck Priest led his men down to the road past the ranch. For quite a while they sat on their horses at a little distance from the ranch-house, debating just what to do.

"We'll go on," decided Buck Priest. "Before daylight we can be in the West Fork pass, and if they run those cows into that pass we'll show the dirty thieves a merry time."

"Jist lemme get a sight of the fellers that leaded up O'Steen," said Rowdy. "I'm shore honin' for a chance at 'em."

"Daylight will tell the tale," said Priest. "They'll try and run 'em through early in the mornin'. I wouldn't be surprized to find the hills around the Two Bar X full of my cows."

They were about two miles south of the Half-Wheel, traveling along the road through a narrow defile in the heavy brush, when a rifle spat fire almost in front of them. It was so sudden and unexpected that the four riders whirled in a mass, trying to control their horses. From several places in the brush came orange-colored flashes, followed by the angry spat of rifle shots. Buck Priest's horse went down in a heap, pinning Buck to the ground.

Ken Mader's horse fell, but Ken flung himself free and began shooting from the ground. For several moments it was a nightmare of rearing, kicking horses and sporadic flashing of rifle and revolver shots. Mader went down on his face.

Rowdy's horse was shot from under him, but he managed to regain his feet and mount behind Dick Leesom and spur the frightened horse into a gallop back up the road. Dick had been shot through the side and was unable to control his horse or to shoot a gun.

A flurry of rifle shots followed them, but the bullets buzzed far over their heads.

Not one of the bushwhackers came in sight. As far as they were concerned they never existed. Buck Priest had dropped flat on his back to escape the hail of lead. His leg was pinned beneath his dead horse, and it was impossible for him to extricate it. He could see the white face of Ken Mader in the moonlight, and he cursed Park Reber and his men.

He tried to draw his leg loose from beneath the horse, but the pain forced him to desist. He was sure the leg was broken. He swore bitterly, feeling sure that they had run into the rustler's ambush.

Back in the hills, only a mile away from the road, were Park Reber and his men. They had heard the shooting, but the echoes were so confusing that none of them could tell where the shooting was taking place.

"Sounded like a battle all right," declared Reber. "We'd better head for the road, I think. Unless I'm mistaken, that's where the shooting came from."

They traveled due east, striking the road a few hundred yards north of where the ambush had been laid. They did not see Leesom and Dow, who had gone past the spot, and were heading north. But they did find Dow's hat in the road. It was a black Stetson, fairly new, but not marked with name or initial.

"Somebody goin' plenty fast," said one of the men. "That's hat's too good for a puncher to throw it away."

"No way to tell which way he was goin'," drawled a cowboy.

"We'll go south and take a chance," said Reber. And then they found Buck Priest, pinned down by his dead horse, and Ken Mader lying dead beside his dead horse. The men dismounted. Buck Priest recognized them and spat a curse at Park Reber.

"Got yuh, eh?" grunted Reber.

"Mader's dead," said one of the men.

Reber gave them orders to lift the horse off Priest's leg.

"Well, you've got me, Reber," said Priest. "My leg's busted. I hope yo're satisfied, you dirty cow-thief!"

"I will be satisfied, yuh can bet on that," said Reber. "Yo're all through in this valley, Buck Priest—you and yore S Bar P outfit. When I get my hands on Jack Silver I've made a clean sweep."

"When yuh do," gritted Priest.

"Oh, I will," rasped Reber. "I've started out to clean up this valley."

"Clean! It'll never be clean as long as *you* live. You killed O'Steen today—yore men did. He saw yuh stealin' my cows. And yuh—oh what's the use? You've got the best hand, Reber. Go ahead and do what yuh want to."

"I never killed O'Steen," denied Reber.

"Yore men did."

"Did they? I didn't know it. Where's June Meline?"

"That female fiddler?"

"Yeah, that female fiddler! Where is she?"

"I heard somebody stole her."

"Oh, yuh did, eh? I reckon yuh didn't need to *hear* it. Some of you boys lift him on a horse. We'll take him along with us and settle his case at the Two Bar X."

They lifted Buck Priest to a saddle, and he cursed them for hurting his broken leg. Perhaps they were none too gentle.

"Want to rope him on, Park?" asked one of the men.

"What for? If he falls off he can't run away, can he?"

Two of the cowboys rode double and one of them led Buck Priest's horse. The jolting of the horse was misery to Priest, but he clamped his jaws tightly and held all his weight on his right stirrup.

THE first faint touch of dawn streaked the old pole corrals and the stables of the Two Bar X. Huddled in a chair beside the table in the main room sat June Meline, wrapped in a blanket, asleep. At one of the front windows stood Jack Silver. He had watched all night for the return of Bell, who he was sure would come back. The body of McLeese still lay where it fell.

He turned his head and saw June looking at him. She had slept for several hours.

"How are yuh feelin', June?" he asked.

"All right, Jack. Oh, I must have slept a long time. Why, it's morning!"

"Just about. We'll get some breakfast and then I'll rope a couple of horses. I dunno what became of my horse, but I think they took him away. We're goin' back to Tomahawk, June. Somethin' is wrong out here."

She nodded and got up from her chair.

"I'll get the breakfast, Jack. I can cook."

"I'll betcha," he smiled. "Yo're quite a woman, June. I don't blame Reber for likin' yuh. I never knew that women had the nerve you've got. After what you went through since yuh left Tomahawk yesterday, it's a wonder you've got any nerve left."

"But I've been frightened," confessed June. "If you had said 'boo!' to me yesterday I'd have dropped your gun."

"Mebbe not," said Jack smiling. "That gun is too easy on the trigger to take any chances. I might have just booed a bullet into my nervous system."

Jack laughed and turned back to the window, leaning forward tensely. There were cattle drifting past the rear of the corrals and sheds—a compact mass of moving animals heading northwest toward the West Fork pass. Jack stepped to the door and opened it enough to give him a farther view down the valley. As far as he could see down the valley there were cattle surging ahead like a brown wave.

Jack shut the door quickly. A man had slipped through the corral-fence at the corner of a shed, a man carrying a rifle in his hand.

"What is it, Jack?" asked June anxiously.

"The big steal!" he exclaimed. "I know the answer now, June. Reber's own men are stealing from him—taking a big herd over the West Fork pass. That's why they stole yuh, don't yuh see? They didn't want anybody here to see 'em. That's why there wasn't anybody here, June.

"That's why they've blocked the road against Reber. McLeese had this framed before Reber fired him. God knows how many of Reber's men are in on it. They're tryin' to send 'em over the pass before anybody can get out here to catch 'em."

"But—but they know we're here," panted June.

"They sure do," said Jack bitterly. "Keep out of line with the windows. I've got the doors fastened and I've got two guns. But our best chance is to lay low. We know too much for them to let us get out alive, June. Their plans were upset when Reber sent you out here."

"But won't they be in such a hurry to get the cattle over the pass that they'll leave us alone?"

June's answer came in the form of a bullet, which smashed out a pane of glass and thudded into the rear wall of the room. Jack drew June back against the wall, and they edged their way to the front of the room.

"Flat on the floor under the windows," said Jack. "They'll not shoot that low."

A shower of glass sprayed over them when a bullet tore through the window casing.

"Shootin' wild," said Jack easily. "Listen to the cattle."

They could hear the dull rumble of the moving herd, the soft bawling of calves.

"They're movin' a mighty big herd," said Jack. "It sure will hit Park Reber hard."

"You ought to be glad," said June wearily.

"I wonder if I am? If it was anybody but his own men I might."

"You believe in loyalty, Jack?"

"If yuh mean trustin' a friend or an employee—yes."

"You've been to school?"

Jack nodded shortly.

"Six years, June—in Cheyenne."

"Who sent you there?"

"I don't know. I don't even know who paid for it. I was sent from the reservation when I was about eight years old. I never went back there, June. I was fourteen when I came here. I worked for Buck Priest quite a while, and then I built me a place on Trapper Creek. I was goin' to be a cowman, and I had a good start, but Park Reber's men killed off my cattle. I've been in the valley eleven years."

"You are twenty-five years old, Jack?"

"I think so."

"Who was your father?"

He looked queerly at her. Another bullet smashed through the kitchen window and ricocheted off the stove.

"I don't know who he was," said Jack. He ran his fingers along the barrel of his six-shooter. "No one would tell me after I came back from school. They said I was the son of a squaw-man."

Jack sat up with his shoulders against the corner of the room. Some one had come on the porch and was near the door. Jack leaned sidewise and sent a bullet angling through the center panel. His shot was echoed by a yelp and a curse.

"They're still in there!" yelled a voice.

Bullets came through the door about two feet above the floor and more came through the smashed windows. The opposite wall of the room was beginning to show signs of wear. A bullet smashed the lamp, causing a small shower of kerosene.

Some one was trying to open the kitchen door. Jack snaked along the wall to the kitchen entrance and sent a bullet through the door just above the knob. He heard a sharp cry and turned to see June, one hand across her face. She had tried to follow him.

He rolled back to her and drew her back under the window. A bullet had come through just below the sill, and had scored her temple just enough to break the skin and raise a blue welt. She was dazed, bewildered. She tried to get to her feet, but Jack pulled her down.

"You're all right, June," he told her. "It's not serious. Stay down, girl!"

He held to her with one hand. There was smoke drifting in through the broken window—too much smoke to be caused by the shooting. Jack sniffed at it.

Wood smoke! They had fired the ranch-house!

He could hear the flames crackling now, and the smoke was getting heavier. June was recovering, but it seemed that the injury had broken her nerve. She began crying softly and Jack patted her on the arm.

"It's all right, June," he told her. "Don't cry. You've got to hang on to yore nerve, girl. They've set the house on fire. It's do or die, I guess. We can't stay here and burn to death."

The wall was getting hot. There was a little breeze, and the seasoned old building was as dry as tinder. June blinked at him through her tears. She understood what he was saying.

"We'll crawl to the kitchen door," he told her. "I'll open the door and jump out. Mebbe I can drive 'em back so you can get away. It's our only chance. They might let yuh go and figure on catchin' yuh. I'll stop 'em as long as I can, June."

They slid along the wall to the kitchen. The shooting had stopped. Jack knew they were merely waiting for them to try to make a break. Beside the door they stopped and Jack held out his hand to her.

"Good-by, June. You stay here until I tell yuh when to come out—if I last that long."

"Good-by, Jack." June's face was white and drawn. "I forced you into this. If it hadn't been for me you'd be free."

"Tha's all right; it was a mistake, June. It's all in the game. I reckon I'd forgive you for anythin'. Good-by."

He raised up from his haunches, grasped the door with his left hand and gave it a jerk. It stuck fast. He dropped the gun in his holster and grasped the door with both hands but it refused to open.

"Stay here, June," he panted, dropping to his knees and crawled back to the front door.

The room was full of smoke now.

He went to the door, got to his feet and tried to open it. He could force it open about two inches—enough to see that a rope ran from the knob to a porch-post.

A bullet smashed through the paneling and raked him along the forearm. He dropped to his knees, coughing from the smoke, and crawled back to June. His left forearm and hand were covered with blood.

"They've locked us in, June," he said. "If we try to get through a window they'll riddle us."

June merely stared at him, her mind refusing to work.

"You mean, we can't get out—we've got to burn?"

Jack was staring at a spot in the center of the floor. There was a metal ring sunk in the floor, and beyond it were two hinges—the root-house trap-door.

He sprawled over and dug the ring loose. With a heave he opened the trap, and the odor of musty old vegetables filled the room. An old ladder led down to the bottom. June went down first. There was more shooting, but they could not hear the bullets now.

Jack left the trap open to give them a little light. The root-house was about six feet deep and of about the width of the kitchen. It was cool down there, and no smoke penetrated. They took deep breaths to rid their lungs of the smoke.

On one side was an accumulation of old boxes and barrels. Jack lighted a match and almost shouted with joy. Behind those old boxes and barrels was a stairway which led to an outside root-house door.

He flung the boxes aside, clearing the disused stairway, a prayer in his heart that the door might not be nailed down. They could hear the snapping of the flames now, the hoarse shouts of men, the crackle of guns.

Jack put his shoulder against the old slanting door and lifted enough to find that it was not fastened down.

"We'll beat 'em yet, June," he panted. "The fire seems to be mostly at the front of the house yet. We can stay here for a few minutes."

June was swaying sidewise, and before Jack could spring to her assistance she had fainted. He lifted her up and held her in his arms. In falling she had struck her head against the corner of a box, cutting it badly.

He tore the muffler from around his neck and bound it around her head. Then he picked her up in his arms and staggered up the old steps, where he hunched in as low as possible, bracing his right shoulder against the door.

PARK REBER did not lead his men straight for the Two-Bar X, but took the left-hand road and headed for the Circle S, where he decided to pick up Jim Carlin and his men. He intended sending one man from there to the Lightning to get the assistance of Nort Jackson and his crew. Reber was going to have enough men to comb every inch of the country.

It was nearing daylight when they rode into the Circle S. The ranch was deserted.

"Mebbe they're chasin' rustlers already," said one of the men.

"More likely out doin' a little rustlin'," said Buck Priest grimly. His face was the color of ashes, his left leg dangling uselessly from outside the stirrup. The old man was living on his nerve now. Park Reber scowled at him, but said nothing in reply to Priest's sarcasm.

"Shall we go to the Lightnin'?" asked a cowboy.

"No," said Reber shortly, and headed for the Two Bar X.

The men were tired, sleepy, hungry; they were willing to go anywhere to stop for a while. They did not go back to the road, but cut across the hills. Daylight came swiftly, and the sun was painting the tops of the hills when they struck the road about a mile below the Two Bar X.

And here the road was a mass of cow tracks. Reber leaned forward in his saddle, pointing at them.

"The trail of the rustlers," he said. "They're headin' for the West Fork pass."

"Listen!" Nelson threw up his hand.

From far up the road they could hear the rattle of rifle-shots.

"My ——!" exclaimed Reber. "The boys of the Two Bar X are tryin' to stop 'em! Come on!"

Some one lashed Buck Priest's horse across the rump with a rope, and the animal almost unseated the suffering old man. He gritted his teeth and rode along with them. The men were riding with rifles in their hands now.

About three hundred yards short of the Two Bar X, the road topped an elevation around the point of a hill and, as they swung around this point, Park Reber, riding at the head of his men, drew rein.

The whole front end of the ranch-house was enveloped in flames, and beyond the burning house the hills were full of cattle. They saw a man running away from the corrals. He mounted a horse and headed for the cattle.

A rifle bullet struck the ground in front of Reber's horse and buzzed angrily away. The riders separated like a covey of quail. Another bullet thudded against a horse, and its rider flung himself free as the horse reared up and fell backward.

Cowboys were dismounting as swiftly as possible, letting their horses go; then they ran ahead, taking advantage of every bit of cover. Rifles began to crack as the Reber men searched the corrals and sheds with bullets.

Mounted men began riding from behind the stable, heading toward the cattle.

"Get yore horses!" yelled Reber. "They're headin' for the pass."

The men continued to shoot at the retreating cowboys. One of them pitched sidewise off his horse, and his horse came back toward the stable. Reber's men mounted swiftly and swept down on the ranch.

A man ran from the stable-door, trying to get around the corner, but a hail of bullets cut him down. He went flat on his side, rolled over and fired one shot in return. Park Reber jerked back in his saddle and slid to the ground.

At that same moment one of the men yelled warningly. The outside root-house door was flung open and out came Jack Silver, carrying June Meline across one arm. He staggered, flung up his right hand to shoot at them, but tripped over an old water-bucket and fell flat.

Several cowboys threw themselves upon him before he could get up, and held him tightly. They yanked him to his feet, and others took charge of June.

"Well, yuh got me, I guess," panted Jack.

"I guess we have!" snorted a cowboy. "Yo're all through, you dirty half-breed."

Jack shut his lips tightly.

"Reber's been hit hard," said one of the men. "That feller down at the stable got him."

They led Jack around to where Reber was lying. But Jack paid no attention to Reber; he was staring at old Buck Priest, who was barely able to sit in his saddle.

Park Reber had the men lift him to a sitting position. He looked at Jack Silver closely.

"I swore I'd get you, Silver," he said. "I started out last night to clean out the valley. I don't know how badly I'm hurt, but it's bad enough. But you've stolen your last cow, kidnaped your last woman. If you've got any prayers to say you better say 'em."

"I'm not prayin'," said Jack coldly. "I never stole yore cows and I never kidnaped any woman."

"What else could yuh say?" cried Reber, and then to his men, "Run a rope over the ridge-pole of the stable."

The men hurried to do his bidding. Old Buck Priest had heard Reber's order, and it seemed to amuse him greatly.

"Goin' to hang the lad, eh?" he laughed. "Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! That's good! Goin' to die with that on yore dirty soul, eh? It's like yuh, Reber."

He turned to Jack, who was being held by two men.

"Reber's men bushwhacked me last night, Jack. They killed Ken Mader. Yesterday afternoon they killed O'Steen."

"You lie!" declared Reber weakly. "You're tryin' to turn it around. You stole my cattle and my men caught yuh."

"And yore men shot Sam Herd yesterday, Priest," declared Nelson.

"Lies!" panted Buck. "All lies! We didn't know Herd was dead until we met yuh at the forks of the road, Nelson."

"The rope's ready, Park," called one of the men.

One of the cowboys threw a noose around Jack's neck, but he did not quiver. He was probably the coolest man in the crowd.

"Have you said yore prayer?" asked Reber.

Jack shut his lips tightly.

"All right," said Reber weakly.

"I wish you'd wait until June Meline recovers," said Jack. "She might have somethin' to say."

"Your time is up, Silver."

"Yuh better not hang him," said Buck Priest. "You'll be sorry, Reber. Ain't there nothin' that can save him?"

"Not a thing, Priest."

"All right, Reber. Go ahead and hang him. Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! Hang him, you dirty old pup! Hang yore own son, and be —— to yuh! Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

In spite of his weakness, Reber jerked forward, staring at Buck Priest. Jack Silver stumbled forward, his eyes on the curiously twisted features of the old cattleman. Reber tore his gaze away and looked at Jack Silver.

"You lie, Priest!" he said.

"I don't lie! He's your son, Park. His mother died when he was born and he was nursed by a squaw. Ask him who his father was—he don't know, I tell yuh!"

Jack shook his head.

"I kept track of him, Park," said Priest. "I shipped him to school and paid for it. I wanted an ace in the hole. You've always wondered if there was a child. Look at him, Reber. He's yore own flesh and blood—and you're goin' to hang him! Let's get it over with, Reber. I want to see you hang yore own son."

Reber shut his eyes, and after a few moments the tears trickled down his cheeks. The wound was sapping his strength. It was a long way to a doctor, and he knew he couldn't live till one came.

One of his men came bustling into the crowd.

"Hey," he shouted, "that fellow down by the stable is Bell, of this ranch, and the one on the hill up there is Bob Cliff, of the Lightnin'! What does it mean?"

"It means that Reber's own men planned to clean him out," said Jack Silver. "They kidnaped June Meline. I found her and brought her here. Last night Bell killed McLeese. He was on the porch and he's burned up by this time. I think you'll find that the Circle X, Lightnin' and Two Bar X outfits were makin' a big steal, but circumstances blocked 'em."

Reber opened his eyes and stared at Jack.

"Is that all true, Jack?" he asked.

"The girl's awake," burst in one of the men.

They brought her over to Reber. She saw the rope around Jack's neck.

"He—he saved me!" she said hoarsely to Reber. "Jack Silver wasn't to blame. It was your own men. Oh, you've been hurt again!"

Reber leaned back and his face was very white now.

"Come in close, boys," he said weakly. "Listen to what I'm sayin'. No time to write. Jack Silver is my son. Everything I own belongs to him. I think Buck Priest taught him to hate me. I—I didn't kill off his herd of cattle. Mebbe my men did it. But it's all right now. He owns this valley and everything else I have.

"Get Buck Priest to a doctor. I don't hate him any more. He gave me back my son. Jack—come closer. This—is—June. She's—fine. I—I—"

His head fell forward on his chest.

THERE was little left of the old ranch-house when Jack Silver and June Meline stood beside the body of Park Reber, who seemed to be smiling in his sleep. Nelson came up to Jack and held out his hand.

"You'll have to hire new crews, Jack," he said. "I imagine a lot of Diamond R men went over the West Fork pass this mornin'."

"Let 'em go," said Jack. "There's been enough killin'."

He put his good arm around June and they went down toward the stables, where the men were rigging a stretcher to carry Buck Priest back to his ranch.

More of our Serial of Leif, Son of Eric the Red

A New Found World

HERE am I, a spirit of the heavenly host, in the body of Captain B——, whose own soul was released from its corporeal shell in Flanders just in time for me to resume my life on this earth. I know that I have dwelt here before, for I can remember two other spans of life on this earth. Nurse Maryon and the doctors think my mind is affected. They want me to write down my past life to further the cause of science and to ease my mind of what they call its hallucinations. So I shall take the story of myself as the boy, Leif Ericson, in the tenth century of Christ, for it is that story I remember most clearly.

My father's name was Eric the Red, and our home was on Ax Isle in the bay called Broadfirth in Iceland.

One day my father put me in mock charge of our ship the *Fafnir*, for half a day, and I found a mighty log of fine wood out in the bay and forced the men to grapple it and bring it home. Father was pleased, for wood was scarce on Iceland, and I decided that I was no longer a child.

Then a man came to us from Thorgest Skinflint in Thorgest's boat and said that Thorgest's son was marrying, and that a new house was being built for him, for which Thorgest wanted our fine timber carved for posts and panels.

Yule came, and with the Yule Stir the Slayer, with a warning that Witch Katla, who had said she loved Eric before my mother Hilda took him, would work us an injury.

Summer brought new tales of a feud between Katla and her neighbor, the grim lady Geirrid, whose son Arin was called the Peacemaker.

CHAPTER VI

THE SLAYINGS AT MEWLITHE

THE dawn was breaking when my mother wrapped me up in my oily coat, with a little slap to warm the starboard ear and a kiss on the weather cheek. Then father threw the sealskin bag at me, giving me the date for meeting him at Broadfirth.

So, full of importance as pilot, I bade my crew—Captain Alfgeir and Nail, his seaman—to step aboard the dinghy and trim her well. While the one shoved off and the other made sail I took both tiller and sheet, with a knowing eye at the dawn, the wind and the first set of the

By

ROGER POCOCK

ebb. Three tacks cleared the bend of the creek and, easing the sheet, I ran for the open, while buildings and snow-clad fields hazed into gray mists astern. Hvamm Bay broadened out to the east. Soon we were running free to the southwestward, dodged the low skerries, slid between the islands, used the swing of the ebb and threaded among the ice floes with Hvamm Bay astern, all Broadfirth open ahead and on our larboard bow the new sun reddening that giant's fist of Snowfell. As the breeze freshened I had my crew bailing with all their might to keep the dinghy afloat while I carried on.

I pointed out to Alfgeir the wide bays and headlands, the temples and farmsteads all along the southern shore of Broadfirth, as we ran past Thorsness and Holy Fell, Bear Haven, Whalefirth and the beach of Ere, until in mid-afternoon we rounded under the screes of Buland's Head and slid up to the creek of Mewlithe.

There came the lady Geirrid's son, Arin the Peace-maker, down from the house to make us welcome and help beach the dinghy. He was a tall man, twenty years of age, swart and nicely ugly, a moody fellow of no words, but very gentle deeds, poor but a gainful manager, a worker who did not gossip or meddle with his neighbors. I liked him well, albeit his feet and hands were the ugliest ever seen on any man.

At the house we found his mother Geirrid throned in her high seat, railing at little Aud, young Arin's wife, who went meekly about her work getting the supper. That high seat was Aud's place if she had her rights, and Geirrid should wait at table. Aud had decayed teeth, a smile of cloying sweetness and an appealing manner which got on Geirrid's nerves.

The mother Geirrid and her son Arin had just the same outstanding brow, snub nose, wide mouth, rough hair, but the woman was harshly masterful, the man gently obedient. I shrank from Geirrid, but was drawn to Arin and pitied little Aud.

"Well come," said Geirrid, and her manner was very stately as became her rank. "We are glad to see Alfgeir the skipper, aye, and the strong thrall, for since my son is too much the woman we need men here. And whose brat?"

"A son of chiefs," I answered pretty roughly, "who brings you a hood for Katla the witch—" I threw it at her feet—"and goes elsewhere for supper."

"Tut, tut," she laughed at me. "Here's breeding, eh? And red-gold hair like Eric's, gait of a sailor already and dear Hilda's nose. You can be my guest—or Katla's, which you please. Come, sit by me and make friends."

The board was set, and I felt very hungry. Stockfish there was, and buttered oatcakes with milk. At Arin's bidding I sat with him at table.

Arin was owner of Frostmane, the famous fighting stallion, and made a deal of money backing him at the horse-fights. He told me I might not see Frostmane, who was up in the fells at pasture.

Being a trained fighter Frostmane held that pasture against all comers, nor would he suffer any other horse to get a bite of grass.

Then Arin told me of grave trouble brewing. Thor's Bear, the Bully of Frodis Water, forever riding rough-shod over his neighbor's rights, was wont to have the stallions driven to Frostmane's pasture. Moreover, it was usual at this season for rich men to offer horses in sacrifice to the gods, and for this purpose Thor's Bear had lately sent for his herd to be brought to the farm.

"They can not be found," said Arin. "It is quite likely that Frostmane drove them out of his pasture, and in that case they must have perished in the snows."

Long afterward the skeletons of these stallions were found on Snowfell.

"Now Thor's Bear," said Arin, "sent Odd Katlason over the moors to a place called Under-the-Lava, on the south shore of Snowfell. There dwells Cunning Gils, who is foresighted, a most famous scout and spy in matters such as theft. Odd Katlason told Gils that Thor's Bear wanted to know what thief had stolen his stallions. Gils sent back word:

"'Tell Thor's Bear that the weather has drifted his stallions to the nearest windbreak, but they are not far strayed, yet even were they stolen 'tis a risky thing to tell men's names lest there be shedding of blood.'

"All this we know to-day, Leif, because Cunning Gils is our friend, and sent a message to warn me how Odd talks at large, pointing suspicion at me."

"Gils has done well," said the bitter Lady Geirrid, "'Tis time I had such warning when a son of my body is suspect of being a thief. What further shame could there be upon a gentlewoman. Leif, mark you well this son of mine who soweth cowardice and reaps contempt for my eating."

Arin bore all in silence. A coward would have flinched from the tongue which bit like a sword. It seemed to me that the mother was sowing mischief for the son to reap trouble. I held my peace and drank my milk and listened.

In after days it came to light, how Odd, prompted by Katla his mother, came shambling back with the message from Cunning Gils amended for Thor's Bear's hearing. See how the slanderer wrought upon the bully!

"Thor's Bear, Gils gives you greeting and he says, ''Tis risky to tell men's names lest there be bloodshed. Your stolen horses are not far off. Search at a poor man's farm where there are extra men guesting this winter.'"

So Odd pointed toward Mewlithe, a poor man's farm, where Alfgeir and Nail were to winter.

All that evening Geirrid was uneasy, bidding Arin, her son, to send for help at once. He would have done so but that she set his back up. While she railed at him for a coward, he sat on a stool by the fire, honing his sword with a whetstone, speaking to me in whispers. I could feel in the air how Arin and his wife were full of misery, and the old lady of spiteful bitterness.

We Icelanders were ashamed to seem tired or hungry, wet or cold, when we came in from a journey, but while I sat watching Arin whet his sword I must have fallen asleep. He carried me to a bunk and kissed me—a strange thing to do.

Breakfast was over next morning, but Geirrid not yet astir, and Arin was getting a pony saddled for my riding to Broadfirth, when we saw twelve horsemen come riding from Frodis Water. As they drew near, Arin would have his people arm themselves but bade me ride to the eastward, as if I could turn my back upon his trouble. He laughed when I drew my cutlas but, seeing that I would stay, begged me to be in the house guarding his wife and mother. That I would not do, nor leave his side, so presently he showed me which were the men who rode down from the westward hills. Thor's Bear the Bully came first with his son Hallstein, after them running afoot was Odd Katlason, a long slack-jawed youth in a new earth-brown kirtle. Next came a brisk man on a bay horse, who was Ir, son of Eagle, of Eagle Knoll. The other eight were freemen in Thor's Bear's pay, or thralls of his household. Against these twelve men we counted only seven standing in the doorway.

As they rode into the yard and dismounted, Arin gave good greeting, asking for the news.

"Arin," said Thor's Bear. "This is our errand here, that we are seeking the horses stolen from me. Therefore, we claim to ransack your stead."

Arin's voice quivered a little, for the insult roused him.

"Is this done," he asked, "according to law? Have you called up law-seekers to search into your case? Or otherwise have you sought for right to ransack?"

Thor's Bear answered roughly that he had done enough.

"Then," said Arin, "if you begin this business lawlessly we flatly refuse to be ransacked."

"Knowing your guilt, eh? So you won't have this charge of theft put off you by fair search?"

And Arin yielded.

"Do as you please," he said.

He told me in a low voice how the process was void in law, set up by a bully, overbearing and reckless of poor men's rights. The court at Thorsness would give swinging damages for this outrage. I think he had more fear of his mother's tongue than of these enemies.

Thor's Bear was telling off six of his men for a door doom; which was a sort of inquest into debts. This court must stand so far from the house door that there should be room to drive between with a wain-load of hay. Thor's Bear applied to his court for judgment against Arin, with right of search.

Still Arin kept his temper, even laughed a little at the formalities of this outrage against his rights and manhood. All had gone well but for the mother Geirrid, out from her bed to the porch in a mean temper.

"Overtrue," she cried, "is that which men say, Arin, that you are more a woman than a man, to take from Thor's Bear the Bully all shame soever! Nor wot I why I am shamed by having such a son."

Thor's Bear's people sniggered, and Arin could bear no more, for his own men were against him now. Even Alfgeir rousing until he seemed quite half awake, cried:

"Geirrid, bestir yourself. Count on our aid!"

I felt that Arin, much as I liked him, were better dead than put to such disgrace. I heard him cry out—

"No longer will I stand here!"

With that he ran alone to break up the door doom, and his first sword stroke felled one of Thor's Bear's men. Arin was close beset by an attack of ten before Alfgeir, broad awake at last, came to his rescue, wounding a second man. But while our people joined one by one in the sword-mote, old Geirrid clutched me saying I was too young. She was so strong, that while I struggled to get free, one of her men was struck dead before I could fend the sword-blow. Leaving the shoulder of my kirtle in Geirrid's clutch I fell upon Odd Katlason with my cutlas. Gaping like a fool, shouting with terror, backing away in his fright, he made no guard with his blade, while with my short cutlas, slashing with all my strength, I could not get my steel to bite on that earth-brown kirtle. It was so woven warp and woof with his mother's magic that no sword might hurt him. I could not reach up to his face.

Both sides were fighting so fiercely that we never saw Aud or her women as they came out from the house, until they threw cloths and blankets over our weapons. My cutlas was fouled, but Odd's long sword was still waving free when he saw his chance and struck. I jumped aside so that the blow grazed past my shoulder, and yet I felt it bite on something close behind me. At that Odd ran away. I turned about to see where the sword stroke had fallen. There was little Aud wrapping an apron round her arms as she staggered in at the doorway.

Now that the women had stopped our fight—the first I ever saw—Thor's Bear was busy getting his two badly wounded men off to the horses. I watched the twelve of them mount and ride away, but the rest of the folk were gone into the house to swear at Aud and her women for interfering. A dead man of ours was lying in the yard, and close by my feet in the mud I found a severed hand. Picking it up—rather sick—I ran into the house, calling to Arin, to whom I showed the thing.

"A woman's hand," he whispered, awestruck, then in a sudden horror screamed, "Where's my wife?" His face looked like that of the dead thrall lying out in the yard.

The women said that Aud had gone to her bed, and in her bunk we found her huddled up, both arms wrapped with the apron. Arin could hardly speak, but clutched at his throat, while in a hoarse whisper he managed to force out the words—

"Are you wounded?"

"Pay no heed," she said weakly, seeming to drowse off, but Arin, snatching her out of the bunk held her up, showing his wife to all of us, with the right hand hewn off at the wrist. Lest she should bleed to death he bade his mother Geirrid make haste to bind the wound. She was well nigh gone.

His eyes glowed like coals, there in the dusk of the house, his lips were dry, smoldering against the ashen white of his face. Scarce knowing what I was doing, I clung to his left hand, while with his sword on high he seemed to speak to the gods. Then roughly he thrust me away, so that I fell, bidding me stay where I was. So he rushed from the house followed by Alfgeir, the seaman Nail, a freeman neighbor of Arin's and two thralls—six men in all, for they did not count me.

Running, and hiding lest they should drive me back, I kept behind the men as they left the garth, crossing the low mead southward into the vale of a stream, with downs on either side. A mile within this coombe we came to a garth of hayricks, from whence the trail to Frodis Water took up the hillside westward. Behind the stacks we could see Thor's Bear's horses nibbling at the hay, and hear the babble of the men as they bound their wounds. Loose hay strewed the garth, so that they did not hear our footfalls as we stole in under the overhang of the nearest rick.

Hallstein, Thor's Bear's son, was speaking:

"Arin," he said, "has this day thrust off him reproach of cowardice."

His father answered—I knew that gruff and throaty voice:

"Boldly he fought. Yet many become brave, when brought to bay, who natheless are not ever bold between whiles."

We heard Odd's cackling laugh.

"Arin," he blathered, "must needs be the bravest of men—hee-he-he! Luckless will it be deemed that he so wrought as to cut off his own wife's hand."

"Is that sure?" asked Thor's Bear, horrified.

"Sure as day," laughed Odd.

Beckoning with his sword, Arin had appointed Alfgeir the skipper, and the seaman Nail to charge round the right side of the stack. His own three then were to be held for a moment until Alfgeir was well engaged, before they charged round the left side of the stack, to take the enemy suddenly in the rear. Unnoticed, I took my place to join Alfgeir's attack. I was well resolved that a sword stroke above Odd Katlason's magic kirtle should catch him across his neck. Mother should have the head.

At the signal to charge, the Scots seaman Nail was first around the stack, because Alfgeir stumbled. So far Nail had seemed bold as a bull seal, but now at sight of ten armed men jumping straight at him, he lost his wits with panic, running for his life out of the garth, and on up the snow-clad fells. All ten of Thor's Bear's people set on Alfgeir, who backed against the stack with me beside him, while we fended a rain of blows. Alfgeir was shouting with the joy of battle, but to me it seemed that there was long delay ere Arin led his charge.

And when he came I did not know Arin, so greatly was he changed, this gentle peace-maker. His sword stroke came just as Thor's Bear swung about to meet him, so mighty a blow that it clave through helm and skull to the jaw-teeth.

So was Thor's Bear quieted and, as he fell, Hallstein, his son, forgot to guard himself, looked round, shrieked. Then Alfgeir's sword stroke caught him in the neck. I heard that he recovered from that wound which seemed mortal.

Wrenching clear from the slaying of Thor's Bear, Arin struck next at Ir Eagleson, taking off one leg at the thick of the calf—whereby this man came to be known thereafter as Ir Wooden-leg. Two other men who came against him were slain by Arin. Well was he called Peace-maker.

Of the three men who followed him, two were slain in that mêlée. So of Arin's part there remained himself, Alfgeir the skipper, and one old man, a servant. They did not count me, for I had a separate battle of my own against Odd Katlason. No stroke would bite through his magic earth-brown kirtle, and jump as I might I could not reach up to his neck. He fled, and I went after him, but there again his long stride outsped my short legs.

At last I sat down and cried. Presently I found comfort because there was blood on my cutlas, which left to itself would make good rusty marks. What other boy of thirteen in all the provinces of Iceland had blood-rust on his blade? Besides this battle, with odds at two to one, had been a victory. Only Katla's son and a couple of thralls escaped, of all the twelve, to Frodis Water.

Back went I to the garth, singing a war stave as I threaded my way among the dead and dying, to stain my shoes in the blood pools. Never before had I felt so keenly, eagerly, ravenously alive.

There against the stack in a row, sat Arin the Peace-maker, the skipper Alfgeir, and the old gray thrall. He bade me come away from among the corpses, but Alfgeir, now, half asleep again, laughed drowsily, and Arin bade me go on singing my war song. Good men, said he, must grow up ready to the sword, not wait as he had waited to be dishonored. So when the three were rested, we took Thor's Bear's horses. As we rode away I looked at Hallstein, and Ir Eagleson, who dressed each other's wounds. They had fought well, and I wished them Godspeed to Valhalla.

Up on the slope of the fells, we saw Nail running, who had gone mad with fear and was heading for Buland's Cape. We saw him meeting two of Arin's shepherds who were driving the sheep to the folds. Nail was telling these poor thralls how we who rode along the coombe were Thor's Bear's party, and that Arin was fallen.

So knowing that our party had been afoot, and Thor's Bear's people mounted, Nail made the thralls believe we were the enemy. They left the sheep and fled with him.

"If we don't head them off," said Alfgeir, "they'll be over the Buland Cliffs."

To save them we set our horses to a gallop, quartering up the hillside; but the more we labored and shouted to head them off, the more were these three resolved until they had no doubt we sought to slay them. Then Nail's wind broke so that he was caught, but the two thralls leapt from the cliffs and perished in the sea. That place is called the Thrall Scree to this day.

When we rode down with Nail he was quite sane, and so we picked up the horses left loose in the coombe and took our way to Mewlithe. There Geirrid met us at the house door, standing for a minute while she summed up the horses we had taken, the stains of blood upon us, and her son's eyes which glared with an inner fire.

"So, Arin," she said, "the whetting of you has gone home, and you are a man."

I felt her meaning, that as her son last night whetted his sword blade, so she had whetted his manhood with her rough tongue. For lack of manhood in him for her defense, had she been put to shame with a trial for witchcraft. I think this was the first great lesson in my life—that women must make manhood in their men to guard themselves from dishonor.

"Go you within," said Geirrid, "and dress your hurts." Me she kept outside. "A son of chiefs, eh?" so she twitted me. "With a bloody cutlas, eh? And you don't like me?"

"I like you pretty well," said I. "Isn't it dinner time?"

CHAPTER VII

THE DOOM OF KATLA

NEXT morning, Aud looked out of her bed place, and spoke to Arin, who lay on the floor by her bunk.

"Husband," she said, "are you awake?"

"Aye, all right."

"No will have I, Arin, to turn you out of the house, but I fear me there'll be many another door doom holden here this winter. Well I wot that Snorri the Priest must take up the avenging for Thurid his sister in the death of Thor's Bear, her man."

"Then will I ride," said Arin, arousing himself, "before my mother's up. There'll be less talking."

"Who will you go to?"

"To my uncle Arnkel the Just. Aye, and my sister's husband, Worm the Slender."

"Take my hand with you," said Aud, "And my message to these chiefs. They must keep a strong guard about you, and a watch on Snorri. Else, Arin, you'll be murdered."

"And you, Aud?"

"Alfgeir will guard us here."

So when he had wrapped Aud's hand in a clean napkin Arin saddled a horse and rode away before breakfast.

I wanted to ride to our ship at Broadlair Haven, lest I keep Father waiting, but Geirrid and Aud must have me, they said, to guard them. Indeed, excepting one old man, their outdoor servants were all dead, so there was farm work for Alfgeir and me. Storms threatened also, and the fells would be unsafe if I rode alone. I stayed.

Within a couple of days a neighbor rode in who had passed by Frodis Water. From him we had news that Odd Katlason, in his slack-jawed way, was boasting that he himself had hewn off Aud's right hand. So Geirrid, having my word also to the fact, put Aud to the question, who first denied it, lest there be more bloodshed. Under the torturing of Geirrid's questions at last she yielded, saying that Odd had done this thing, she thought by accident. But when the poor little woman begged Geirrid keep the secret the bitter lady fell into a rage and hustled off the man thrall with her errand, telling her son to come home.

Hard as the farm work was for Alfgeir and myself, the only two men left, we found an hour to spare of an evening, when we would sit with Geirrid beside Aud's bunk, amusing her with talk to charm away her pain. For all my mother's gibing at the bitter lady I never knew anybody so learned in medicine of herbs and charms for pain, in good white magic, such as telling fortunes, in stories of the gods and ballads about old times. Her words were cruel in anger but all her deeds were kind.

In two days from the sending of the message Arin came home, bringing Arnkel the Just, the blithest man, save one, I ever met. They had twelve men well armed and mounted. After a night at Mewlithe, they took Alfgeir with them, allowed me to come, and would have left Nail, only he ran behind us on the trail to Holt.

They say that a boy should be blithe and a man grave, which seems to me great nonsense. Eric my father, Slaying Stir, Arnkel the Priest—middle-aged at the prime of their strength, in the height of their powers, their place in the world assured, confident in their rights—could afford to be blithe, the gayest, most joyous, happiest of men. But I had all to win, strength and power, a place in the world and confidence in my right. In the seeking was I keen, fierce, grave, not to be trifled with, very impatient of fooling. So they chaffed and galled me, whetted me to a sharper edge at winning of my manhood. It was toward middle age that I grew blithe.

Arnkel the Just was very bravely dressed, as became his chiefship. His byrnie of chain mail was in four metals, patterned in silver, copper and gold across the sober steel. His steel cap was damascened with gold. The baldrick which slung his sword was of gold and scarlet. His shield was painted with an Odin-ring in token of his priesthood. His men were finely arrayed as to their weapons, and it was in all a gallant company which rode with sombre Arin up the coombe and over the downs to Katla's farm at Holt.

When we drew rein at her garth the little widow sent out a maid to greet us and make us welcome. She had no men to send.

She sat in her high seat on the dais and spun yarn, with her three maids about her at their sewing. Merrily she asked Arnkel for his tidings, and sent a maid for ale.

"Where's Odd?" asked the Priest.

"Odd fares south to Broadwick. He will be sorry he missed you, Arnkel, because we trust well in your manliness."

"That may be," said Arnkel, very stern, "but we will ransack for him."

"As you will," sighed Katla, bidding the maid who had gone for ale get a torch to light the meat bower, the only locked chamber she had.

While search was made she sat leaning forward staring at me.

"With Eric's face," she said, "you might have been son of mine. I wish—" she sighed. "And how's your mother?"

I made the sign with my hand, forefinger and little finger thrust out making the finger of the moon, which fends off witches.

At that she laughed with the laugh of a vulgar woman.

"And the house furnishings?" she asked. "Are they finished yet for old Skinflint?"

I had the talisman against witchcraft clenched tight in my hand to guard me.

"Did Hilda see a vision of snow above charred timbers at Ax Isle?"

The search was over. Though I might not run I was glad to go. In the barton we mounted and rode away.

Now it was very strange that when Katla had bent her mind and eyes upon me, I had seen the spinning-wheel beside her grow very misty, more like a crouched man.

We were scarcely clear of the farm when Arnkel drew rein, in doubt.

"Has Katla hoodwinked all of us?" he asked.

"That spinning-wheel," said I. "Was it a spinning-wheel?"

"Or her son, eh?" said Arin. "'Tis not unlike her glamor. Let's go back."

When we went back, dismounting in haste to run in at the door, Katla was in the porch at play with her he-goat, stroking its head and beard while she combed out the coat. On the dais was her spinning-wheel. We scattered it with our swords, but we found nought hidden.

A second time we rode away, but presently Arnkel turned upon Arin.

"It's not in your mind that Odd was there in likeness of that goat?"

Back we went for a third search.

"Your visits come thick and fast," cried Katla from her high seat. Within and without the house, we found nought stirring, save Katla's big house-boar asleep below the ash-pile.

We were half back to Mewlithe when we met Geirrid, mounted, and clad in a blue mantle. She rode in a side-saddle, with a slung plank for a foot rest, and the pony was led by her thrall. She asked us how we had fared, and on being told, laughed at us all for fools. "Turn back," said she. "I will come with you, lest once again you have hoods pulled over your eyes. You have been hoodwinked into mistaking Odd for a spinning wheel, a goat and a boar, by glamor of her magic."

So we returned to Holt, and there found Katla sitting in her high seat. She hailed the Lady Geirrid as a troll.

And Geirrid stood for a long time staring at her, saying at last:

"How feel you?"

"Somewhat uncouth," said Katla. She had gone very pale, and death was in her face, but still she kept good courage.

Then Geirrid dropped the mantle from her shoulders, and put my sealskin bag over Katla's head while we bound the witch with ropes. At Geirrid's orders we took axes to hew the chair away and open up the dais. From underneath we dragged out Odd Katlason, who bleated piteously, and looked like a long-drawn goat and no man. Him we bound also and with these two prisoners set out again on horseback across the coombe, then up along the fell-side until we came at last to Buland's Head. There did we set up gallows, with the rope about Odd's neck.

"Ill is your lot," said Arnkel, "that you had such a mother, for verily she was an ill mother to you."

And so we hanged him.

The sealskin bag had been drawn from Katla's head, that she might see this ending of her son.

"True it may be," she said with quivering lips, "that Odd had no good mother, yet this ill fate he had from me has not been by my will.

"It shall not be hidden from you," she said proudly, "that I wrought all that harm to Gunnlang Thor's Bear's son, wherefrom these troubles come. It is my will that all of you—" she looked at each in turn, and all of us shrank with fear—"that all of you shall have ill-hap from me. I hope withal that this shall come to pass. Leif Ericson—" keenly she peered at me— "go tell your father he shall not see my vengeance until it has fallen. Much shall your mother grieve that she did cross my path.

"But you, Arnkel, who have no mother living, thou son of an ill father, shalt have worse luck than even Odd got from me."

Rolf Halt-foot, father of Arnkel and of the Lady Geirrid, was the foulest man in Iceland, but little dreamed we then how Katla's curse was to fall upon Arnkel to his bane, the cutting off of many and most hideous ruin.

While Katla was still cursing us Nail threw a stone at her. Then all of us threw stones until she was dead, and piled rocks until she was buried. That was well done, putting an end to her mischief which had cost many lives. So we rode down to Mewlithe, well content.

AND now before I show how Katla's vengeance fell upon my parents and on me I must bring to an end this adventure of Arin the Peace-maker.

Some five months after the Mewlithe slayings, when it was early spring, Arin's friends met in council at Bearhaven, the house of Worm the Slender. Arnkel the Just was there, and drowsy Alfgeir.

At this meeting it was shown how Thor's Bear's widow Thurid had gone to her's brother Snorri the Priest demanding vengeance upon Arin, so that the blood suits would be brought against him before the spring assize of Thorsness Thing. The blood gelts for so many deaths would ruin Arin. After the Court rose he would be beset, and very likely slain. It was agreed that Arin should take his loose goods for flight from Iceland. Alfgeir and Biorn his partner, whose ship lay wintering at Erej, should get the vessel dighted for this escape so soon as the ice ran.

Now Snorri got wind of the plot for Arin's escape. Taking eighty horsemen he rode to Arnkel's house where the doomed man lay, and there at the main door declared the summons of Arin to attend the court at Thorsness. After that the Priest rode on to Ere where he captured the Norway crew, holding them prisoners until he had burned their ship. So he made sure of Arin's attendance at Court.

But the moment the ice was out and the sea open, Arnkel and Worm took a ten-oared boat for Arin's rescue. Crossing the mouth of Hvammsfirth to its north-western headland at Daymealsness, they found a Norway ship which had wintered in Diamond Cove. They bought the ship, Worm taking half interest while Arnkel gave the other half share as a gift to Arin. So in mastery and ownership of a good merchant vessel, Arin and Worm sailed for Norway and, parting with them at the outer isles, Arnkel went back to attend the assize at Thorsness. It was many years before I saw Arin again.

When the court met on Thorsness, Snorri the Priest made declaration of Arin's outlawry, seizing his lands and cattle for the were-gelt, whereby the Lady Geirrid and little Aud were left in poverty.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TRIAL OF MICHAEL CRAFTSMAN

BEFORE we take up the next part of the story I should like to show how men were armed and trained at this time, which would be about the year of Christ 981. Some very aged men still wore the ancient armor of the North—a helm with wings or horns, a coat of scaled mail and a round shield. Poor men and thralls sewed into their homespun kirtles pieces of horn to guard the neck and shoulders. But for the most part Icelanders copied those fashions which were said to come from Micklegarth, now Constantinople, then capital of the world. These fashions were first used in the North by our kinsmen the Viking Normans who had conquered Normandy from the Franks. The plain helm had a strap of steel which would slide down to guard the nose. The coat, which we called a byrnie, was of chain mail with a lining of deerskin.

The square-headed shield when used on horseback was long enough to guard one down to the knee. It came to a point so sharpened that when used by a man afoot it could be planted to form a breastwork.

I hold that a valiant heart is better defense for a man than any sort of mail. In England, a land so rich that men could live on beer, they were easily robbed or conquered despite their weapons. In Norway though land was poor the crops could be relied upon for beer which made the fighter soft. In Iceland bleak fells went down to Arctic tundra, soil was scarce and the best crop of oats in a ripening year barely sufficed for our porridge and left nought to spare for brewing. Perforce we were a sober folk, hard-working and thrifty, and so by the very hardness of our barren land the hardiest, richest and best equipped for war of all the northern people. It was our custom to kill the weakest babies; bad winters would sweep away unthrifty farmers; the great storms wrecked and drowned unhandy seamen, and blood feuds saved us from the poverty of settlements overcrowded. So when an Icelander was banished and fared overseas he found himself a chief in lands which bred lesser men. We had not so much as a village in all Iceland, yet was our small republic feared and honored.

So I come back from wandering, to my story.

ON MY journey eastward from Mewlithe to join Father's ship at Broadlair, I suppose I must have ridden the first day with Arnkel and Arin and stayed for the night at Lava, the house of Slaying Stir above Bearhaven. I remember that in the morning Stir showed me the way for some few miles. When I came to the ship at Broadlair Haven I know that the snow was gone and the sun just set after a blithe day, as if in the stormy autumn summer had come again.

I spoke before of the big Snowfell headland as shaped like a giant's arm. The biceps is Wood-strand, looking upon Hvammsfirth, and off this lies an islet guarding a river mouth called Broadlair Haven. Upon the east bank of this haven stood the small unthrifty looking stead of Thorgest Skinflint, son of Stein Much-sailing. Old Thorgest was far gone in years and set in avarice, bleak in his manner, harsh in his dealings, and said to be very rich.

To him a week agone had come my father reporting his shipload of finely carven door posts, high seats and settles, together with bunk fittings, wainscot paneling and timber for a dais, all wrought from my drift tree during a year's work. As to what passed with Thorgest, Eric made haste to tell me so soon as I came aboard.

"I found old Skinflint crouched in his high seat, shivering over a mean fire on a bitter day.

" 'What brings you, Eric Thorwaldson?' he croaked. 'Did you fetch food for your dinner? I have none here.'

"I told him of our ship cargo. Says he, hand to ear, playing deaf—

" 'A gift, you say?'

"I bawled in his ear of the marriage of his son Tind Scarface and the house to be built, the furnishings to be made.

" 'Indeed,' says he. 'So my son Tind is to be wedded, eh? A new house? Oho! Furnishings also? Tind told me nought of all this."

"I bawled to him about his messengers, Michael Craftsman and the man who got frozen.

"He said he had sent no messengers.

"Of course I reckoned that this old fox devised to cheapen my goods before he paid me. He was ever lavish with orders, but apt to come to grief when he had to pay."

I told father that he ought to burn the house about old Skinflint's ears.

"Nay," he sighed, "if I were so impatient with a customer the rest would take offense."

So he went on describing how Thorgest scrambled from the high seat, hobbled on two sticks out at the main door and down the sliding shingle of the beach.

"I thought," he said, "that the old fellow wanted to see my cargo, but seems he had finished with me and would speed the parting lest I stay for dinner. He peeked at the dinghy I had brought to shore, fumbling with oars and rowlocks, snuffling at footboards, thwarts and bailer, while the high wind made him blink and water at the nose: At last he straightened up by jerks until he stood to his height, and poked me with one of the sticks.

" 'Where got you my li'l boat, eh?'

"I told him how his servant Michael Craftsman fared in that wherry to bring me the order for Tind's house garnishings.

" 'I've no such servant,' he whined. 'I sent no message, sought no dealings, that you should be a thief and steal my li'l boat I missed this year back. Thief!'

"I took him by the scruff and drew my sword, then wiped his old hook nose along the blade.

" 'Now,' said I, 'when your three sons fare home tell 'em you called me thief, and had your nose wiped.'

"At that, son, I shoved off, coming aboard here to spend this doleful week awaiting Skintflint's sons. The bosun, aye, and even the steersman beat me at chess each day. My fur is turned to bristles."

I asked—

"Where are these sons?"

"Cruising to try a new ship late come from Norway. Thord the Yeller's sons, Eyolf, your mother's sire, and Mord the Glum are with that ship. There's talk of partnerships in buying her."

Ill did I relish the wasting of my drift log, worth a ship's lading, on woodwork carven all over with Christian demons—unsaleable. This ruinous business would make us the laughing stock of Iceland. The blow was hard to bear.

But where Eric was merely puzzled and vexed at sheer ill luck, I was afraid in all my bones, knowing, as he did not, of Katla's dying curse.

"Leif Ericson," she had said in her last moments, "go tell your father he shall not see my vengeance till it has fallen."

It was after supper, when father and I were alone in the ship's cabin, that I told him of my adventure. Now shall you realize how that Icelandic life made boys to feel and behave like men in face of peril.

From some old tenderness toward Katla, Eric had thrown doubts upon her witchcraft. Now he began to see her hand quite clearly not only in the hurts which came to Gunnlang but also in the feud between Arin's stallion Frostmane and Thor's Bear's horses. Out of this, by subtle and devilish cunning, she had brought about a blood feud betwixt her neighbours of Frodis Water, and Mewlithe, the bane of Thor's Bear, the deadly wounds of Hallstein Thorbearson, and Ir of Eagle, the slaying of six of Thor's Bear's men and four of Arin's thralls, the maiming of little Aud, the pending outlawry of Arin, the hanging of her son and then her own just doom. If these were the ripe fruits of Katla's witchcraft, full reason had we ourselves to dread her vengeance, which we were not to see until it had fallen.

We talked late that night, trying to read into our present trouble with old Thorgest some hidden contact with Katla's deadly malice. So blind men grope.

I WAS fast asleep in my bunk, for it was long before daybreak, when Eric roused me. He wanted me to hear that he was master of his household, by ancient law, by Thor, with powers of life and death. Of course he was. Why should he wake me up to tell me what all men knew? I grumbled at him and went to sleep again.

A second time he roused me, and I was very peevish at being told to get up quick for the trial of Michael Craftsman. I was mighty cross, and told my father so, and dropped off to sleep again.

I suppose then I was awakened by my curiosity, to look out of my bunk into the wan gray dawn which lighted Eric's face where he sat against the stern post in his seat of judgment. Dark against the daybreak stood Steersman Smith and the boatswain, the one on either side of our Irish thrall Michael Craftsman, now prisoner and in irons.

I had not liked this Michael, always exceeding hushed. Little he ever said and what he said was peevish. His ears stood out from his head, his brows had a sullen scowl, his jaw struck forward and he crouched, lowering at Eric.

Young Chips, our ship's carpenter, was being sworn as witness upon my father's arm-ring, the Odin ring of his priestright.

"Upon this Doom-ring I take witness here that Michael Craftsman and I have wrought together this year's work. He did confess to me that he was a runaway thrall, fled from the East Firths and hunted by his master with both men and hounds. Wandering on the moors he thieved or starved until, hard pressed, with the hunt coming into sight, he met with Katla's shepherd who did hide him. Next day the shepherd brought out Katla's word that Michael come down to speak with her at Holt. So he was taken before Katla, who by her magic made him seem to be a cow in the byre while the pursuers searched. When they were gone Michael was fed and clothed, Katla made much of him, and he was grateful to her. He knows but little Icelandic and it is hard to understand his talk. But wit you well, Eric, this man belongs to Katla, not to Thorgest."

My father questioned the prisoner, but the man was sullen. I got out of bed and pricked his conscience sharply with the point of my whittle knife, but he would not speak though the blood came. At last Eric had me put away my knife, and bade Patrick speak to the man in Irish.

"Tell him that Katla is dead."

From that moment the thrall had never any need of an interpreter but began at once to offer thanks to Christ in good Icelandic. Moreover he made haste to kneel before my father, putting his hands up to offer good thrall service.

"Now am I freed," he said, "by Katla's death and glad to make full confession, because I love you, sir." So he began to answer questions blithely—and in the years that followed I never knew him sullen or morose, but ever the happiest of men.

Yes it was true that Katla's shepherd found him lost and starving. He was on the high downs of the Snowfell headland, his master with a strong pursuit behind him, the sea closing in on either side of the narrowing land, the great main sea ahead and no hope left. He had surrendered to Katla, who hid him by her witchcraft and got him for her thrall.

She said she had bought his soul and he took oath to serve her while life lasted.

"When I was Katla's man," he said, "one day we saw a ship out on the sea towing a drift tree bigger than herself, with high upstanding roots.

" 'That ship,' said Katla, 'is *Fafnir*, an old bus which Thorwald the Hersir came with out of Norway. Eric Thorwaldson has her since the old Hersir died. Eric the Red, my enemy. I shall send you soon to kill him.'

"I told her I would not kill, for I am Christian."

" 'Ruin him then," said she.'

" 'Not by your black magic.'

" 'He shall be ruined,' she said 'without that great magic wherewith I saved your life.'

" 'I am your thrall,' I told her. My life belonged to Katla when she saved me.

" 'Know you,' she said, 'that two days east of here at Broadlair stead dwells Thorgest Skinflint, a very aged carl, a rich miser. He has three sons and getting on in years, well married, but one of these, Tind Scarface, has been lately widowed and wants to buy a wife to tend his children. All that is common talk and Thorgest is trying to buy him a cheap wife. No decent man in these parts would bargain his daughter off to such a household. There are no bids.

" 'But wit you well, Michael,' said my mistress, 'if Thorgest Skinflint offered to build a new house for his son, paneled to keep it warm, handsomely furnished, some woman might well be found who would wed Tind Scarface. When the old miser dies Tind will be rich, and he is not so bad. An obedient husband. I will put the rumor about that Skinflint offers a new house for Tind.

" 'And when that story is set in people's minds, I shall send you secretly to Broadlair to steal Thorgest's dinghy. In that dinghy you shall fare to Ericstead in Ax Isle. Eric will know the dinghy by sight and believe you are Thorgest's man.

" 'So you shall tell Eric how Thorgest Skinflint has news of a great driftlog lying at Eric's Creek, good timber for the furnishings of a house. You shall tell Eric that Thorgest is building a house for the marriage of his son, Tind Scarface. You shall bring to Eric an order at market rates to make from the driftlog furnishings for Tind's house.

" 'But you shall bring this order so late in the autumn that the ice is closing, too late for Eric to deal direct with Thorgest as to the patterns, the prices and the dates. Eric, good easy man, will spend a winter's work on chairs and benches, which you shall carve with Christian gods. The very mention of your Christ gives Thorgest fits of rage.

" 'Moreover, in the spring, a second messenger seeming to be from Thorgest shall order panelling to line the house. Then Eric will be sure that the first order really came from Thorgest and he will spend the summer making wainscots. A year from now Eric will take the goods, a shipload of timber carven with Christian gods to insult old Skinflint.

" 'Now you shall understand that this Eric, son of a Norway lord, has no kinsman here in Iceland. Although his wife has friends, their following would be small in any blood suit. Far otherwise with Thorgest Skinflint, son of Stein Muchsailing, allied to Thord the Yeller, and his great clan, and to Snorri the Priest, the greatest chief in Broadfirth. Once Eric is embroiled with Thorgest of Broadlair his days are numbered and his house in ashes.' "

Father and I remembered Mother's rede when she foresaw the bloodshed over at Mewlithe and at our home in Ax Isle—"unbroken snow, above charred timbers here."

"Go on," said Father to the prisoner.

"I call to witness Patrick my countryman and this my brother craftsman, your ship's carpenter, that while I lived at Ax Isoe, I sought to do no evil against you, Eric."

Patrick spoke up for Michael, his countryman.

"I ask you to hear me, Eric, on my oath, that this man was always brooding of woe that must come to your house, which he would fain fend off if it were possible."

The carpenter pleaded also, saying:

"This Michael loves you and all your house, yet was he bound by his oath to Katla that he should wrong you. Let him live and he will fight to the last drop of his blood rather than aught should harm you."

I had my dagger ready to kill Michael but my father bade me put it away again. He was too great a man for mere revenge upon a helpless thrall.

"If now I let you live, Michael Craftsman, if I forgive you, will you be my man?"

The thrall knelt down, and, with his chained hands between Eric's hands, took oath of fealty. The tears ran down his face as he kissed Eric's hands, and from that time we had no man more loyal.

CHAPTER IX

THE FIGHT WITH THE FLYING DRAGON

HAD FATHER and I been wise we should have rendered his rotten old dinghy back to Thorgest Skinflint with silver to pay rent for the year's use. We should then, with Michael Craftsman for our witness, have shown clearly to him how Katla had devised to make ill blood between two friendly neighbors. Easily putting an end to all the trouble we could have gone home in peace.

We have Christ's guidance, and call it common sense. But in those days we had not Christ to guide us. When Odin was king of Heaven and Thor was god of Norsemen, they did not teach us to use common sense. They showed us bitter injury and loss in business, made us lay the blame upon poor Skinflint and bade us seek a bloody revenge because that old fool in his dotage had called my father a thief. Men were not wise until Christ came to guide us.

Try then if possible to see things as we saw them. If we left Thorgest to cackle to his sons of Eric the thief who had wiped his nose on a sword, our going away with the ship would seem to all Broadfirth proof of cowardice. That would have lost us our friends and ruined our business. The ship must stay at Broadlair till we had settlement.

Yes, knowing clearly the peril of a blood feud with all Thorgest's kinsmen, it seemed to Father wise that he should borrow a horse and ride swiftly to his best friend, Slaying Stir. He could be counted upon for counsel, for help and to handsell peace between us and Thorgest's people. That meant a two days' journey for my father, who must leave me in charge of the ship to keep the peace until he came back with Stir. After breakfast, therefore, he pulled ashore alone, left Thorgest's dinghy at Thorgest's door and walked inland to borrow a horse for his journey. Be sure that Thorgest's servants were prompt to tell their master of the dinghy at his house door, Eric on a journey and the ship lying at anchor with a boy of twelve in command. I kept my people on board, line fishing to while away the time, and the day passed.

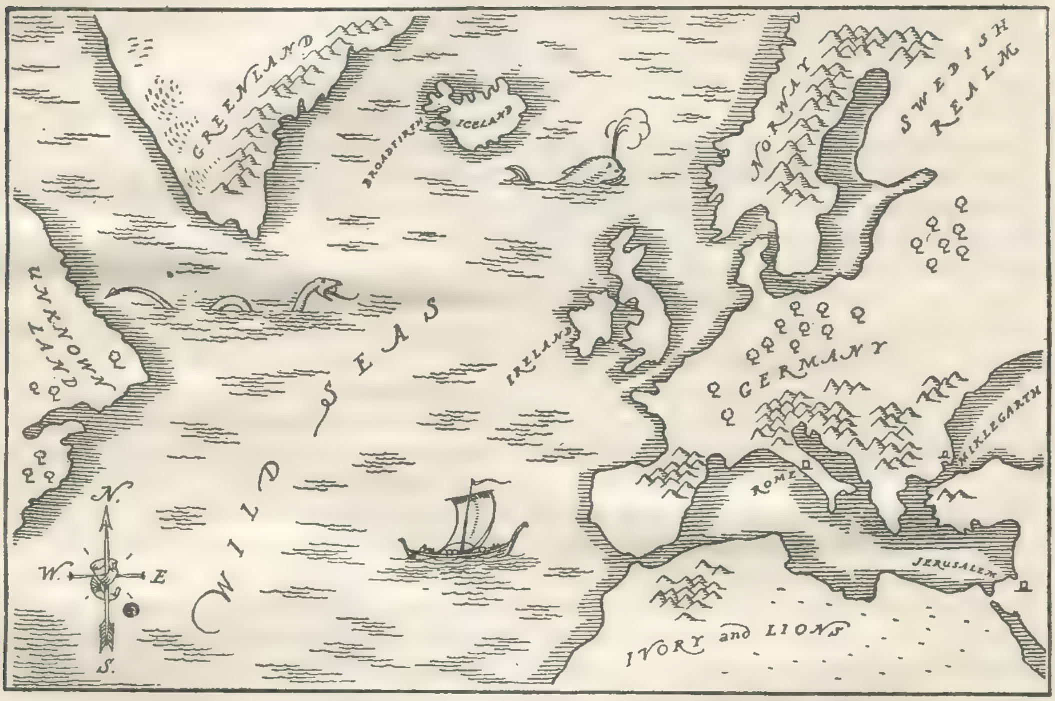
Next morning I was early astir, being mess ward for the day, with the porridge to cook in one pot and the fish to boil in the other at our fire down on the ballast amidships. Patrick, dolefully brooding over me, would have it that if I used one wooden spoon for both pots the porridge might taste fishy. I bade him clean the other spoon or hold his peace while I cooked.

When all was ready I yelled to our people, bidding them show a leg and grab a bone or go fasting. So they stirred from sleep, some washing themselves, some taking a drink of water from the cask abaft the mast, some combing their hair, but all in a hurry for breakfast. We said the prayer—

"From Agir's tempests, and Ran's net, Thor guard us!"

Then all of us fell to with our small wooden spoons upon the porridge pot.

We were setting about the fish when through the still and sunlit air came the sound of oars in warship time and stroke most seamanlike. Of course we all climbed up upon the cargo save Boatswain Patrick, who must get cups and draw small beer for salute to the stranger vessel. So I had my first sight of the *Flying Dragon* as she swept into harbor, threw dripping oars to the salute and housed them inboard with a crash. Taking up her mooring buoy with a boat hook she swung with the tide head seaward and came to, distant a ship's length on our larboard beam. Dipping our standard thrice we gave the salute with our beer mugs.



"Skold!" we drank to her.

The people had breakfast ready when they came to moorings; but Thorgest Skinflint's three sons, and two sons of Thord the Yeller, Eyolf the Gray, and Mord—five slovenly old farmers—put off in a six-oarer to go ashore. Smith told me that the fierce old fellow with a long white beard was Eyolf Thordson, my mother's sire, who had laid his curse upon her.

The five graybeards went to breakfast with Thorgest Skinflint that they might urge his taking shares in buying the *Flying Dragon.* Why they should want her was a secret I never learned, but we knew presently from Thorgest's servants how the old man scoffed. This costly overoared and narrow-gutted warship was built, he said, for speed and could not earn her keep at fishery or freighting. Ill could he bear to argue such nonsense, seeing that Eric, the thief who once had stolen Eyolf's daughter Hilda, now wrought him, Thorgest, deadly wrong and insult, wiping his nose on a sword. At first these carls hurriedly put on armor, but when they learned that Eric was away up country all five declared for breakfast. Afterward the two Thordsons, Eyolf and Mord, took horse, riding off eastward to their homes at the head of Hvammsfirth. We saw no more of them.

As I looked from our poop at the *Flying Dragon* I could have sobbed with envy. No matter how faithful a friend she was to our house, the *Fafnir* was at least a hundred years of age. It was said indeed that she had been built with a steer-board for the steersman to stand on, plying the steer-oar before the invention of rudders, and this must have been so, for I found marks of these fittings on her starboard side. True the dear old bus was roomy for cargo, most weatherly, steering herself, a clean ship in a seaway and victor in many a tussle with Egir the sea demon. Aye, but she was slow, there's no denying that, and now at the season's end most foul with barnacles and weed, whitened with salt, dirtied by handling cargo. A ragged thrall compared with this fine lady the *Flying Dragon!* The warship was Danish-built of oak, bolted and sheathed with copper—think of that! Her figurehead and her curled tail were garnished with scales of copper blazing in the sunshine and all along her bulwark hung the war shields, painted with armorial bearings of her seaman-partners. Any fool could see that she would pull circles round us in all weathers. But what cut me to the heart was the sight of a davit and bilge board carrying such a treasure as had filled my dreams at sea, that new device—an anchor. Any seafaring man who has been obliged to depend for safety on a mooring stone will understand my rage of jealousy.

Ownership of a vessel in sixty-four shares, still common practise in the twentieth century, began, I believe, in the tenth. The *Flying Dragon*, for instance, had thirty-two oars, each oar-share being held by a seaman or by his father. The owner of an oar-share must pull the oar or send his son, a paid freeman or a thrall to do the labor for him. The thirty-two sleeping shares in the company were held by the captain or on his behalf. In this instance the sleeping shares, which paid officers' wages, and ships' upkeep, were held by a friend of ours in southwest Iceland—Leggo Heliulf, Easy-all Heliulf, a lazy sly old fellow, on behalf of his son Bear, as captain.

From childhood had Bear used the sea, as ship's boy, seaman, boatswain, steersman and at last as master of this his earliest command, for now at the age of nineteen he was his father's partner. He used to spend each second Yule at home, but traded for the most part coastwise in Europe. He was accounted a good enough seaman and a very shrewd trader, but being born out of wedlock, mothered by a thrall, was ill-bred, flashy, given to display, relied for his valor far too much on beer. In all, a swollen-headed upstart, not a sound sea-captain. For such a man it was quite natural to forsake the sober ways of trade, to get this long, low, narrow-gutted warship, and think himself a Viking without having learned to fight. Not that he meant to fight but rather to trade in ships, as copers do in horses, for the profit out of a cheap purchase, a lick of paint and a sale.

So reasoned our steersman and boatswain as we three stood on the poop. But while they appraised all facts, I kept my mouth shut as if I had been seasick—green with jealousy.

QUITE unnoticed, a dinghy had come off to us from Thorgest's house. Tind Scarface, son of Thorgest Skinflint, wanted to see our captain. I had him welcomed and brought to me in the cabin, where I took my father's seat, being in command.

There we would be alone.

Tind sat on a stool before me, rubbing his finger along my father's great sword wound for which he was named Scarface. He was aware, he said gravely, of ill blood between his father and mine.

I told him I was sorry that old Thorgest saw fit to insult Eric the Red with a charge of theft. Tind must know that such words are not spoken to any gentleman except as a challenge to battle. Yet my father, knowing the old man to be in his dotage, would deal with Thorgest's sons if they wanted war. Only because there was hope of settlement without bloodshed he had ridden to fetch Slaying Stir, friend of both houses, who would handsell peace.

"I should be well content," said Tind in answer, "but that now as I boarded this your ship and noted the house furniture which is her lading, said to be made for me without my order, I saw the chairs and settles carven with figures of the

Christian demons. This is not brought for sale or trade but as a deadly insult to be atoned with blood."

He drew his sword while he spoke, but I sat in my father's seat which was backed by the stern post. I clenched the chair arms with my hands gripped hard while he menaced, his point against my throat until I could scarcely breathe.

"Much honor shall you have," I gasped, "by killing a sea-captain."

He drew back.

"By killing a child!" He laughed angrily.

"A captain," said I, "with my people on board to avenge me. Do you think, Tind, that if you slay me here alone in this cabin you shall leave the ship alive?"

"Well spoken, lad?" he answered.

"Now, Tind Scarface, suppose you wanted to insult Eric the Red, you would go to him straight, hot and quick to deliver the affront."

He laughed.

"That I would, lad."

"No need," said I, "to waste a half shipload of timber, and a year's work getting ready."

"Nay, of course not. I'm not such a fool."

"Nor is my father. Now you shall hear the tale."

So I had the Steersman and the Boatswain fetch Michael Craftsman, who told the tale of Katla's plot against us.

Then Tind was well content and left the ship, saying there should be armistice until my father brought Slaying Stir to handsell peace. From the poop I watched him go ashore and after a while bring his two brothers.

Now they wore their armor, heavy old-fashioned stuff and somewhat rusted from long disuse, for they were ever very peaceful men. As they came out pulling their six-oarer, which we now should call a jolly-boat, they had no mind to board us but with a friendly wave of the hand to me passed under our bows to call on the *Flying Dragon.* They were talking eagerly together, still set upon their purchase, making a visit of ceremony.

But Bear Heliufson had been equally set upon a sale and resolved to ceremony in calling upon Thorgest, for he was fully armed in helm and byrnie, swanking his sword about, showing off to our people how he could bully his seamen partners.

It seemed he must have a boat's crew to take him ashore, but the men chaffed, bidding him scull his own dinghy. Eric or any real chief would have sculled ashore for himself, for great men with assured rank have no need to enforce their dignity, but this self-made captain had to be prickly for his brand-new honors. In their boat at the gangway his homely visitors sat laughing to see the sport, until Bear noticed them and, somewhat abashed, invited them to his cabin. He sent for a bottle and they all went to drinking within the cabin.

Our men were setting out lines to take some fish for dinner, but I had Steersman and Boatswain on the poop to tell them how well I had debated with Tind Scarface, reaching a truce until my father came. They praised what I had done. I was bucked, merry at our success.

There was Bear out of his cabin again, turned out, thought Steersman Smith, while his visitors debated some part of their bargain to buy the *Dragon.* I leant against the bulwark to study this Bear whom I so sorely envied. Now I began to see, I fancied, that Bear was overgrown for his years, weak in the back and the knees. Others had labored for him until his hands were soft, his arms ill-muscled. His face looked puffy from too much food and drink, with an unhealthy pallor.

Then I looked down at my own tattered shirt, and tarry canvas shorts, arms and legs bare, hardy, weathered, strong as became full manhood. There was my necklace, too, of beads and pendants, each of them a trophy won by doing and learning at the tasks my father set or my masters taught me. Aye, I began to tell my rosary—just like a Christian—the golden bead for obedience that my mother robbed from Freya, the pearl for diving, and Patrick's emerald for making runes, the iron horse-shoe when I passed as farrier, the model horse for breaking my own pony and winning a race against the Steersman's sons, the sword for forging my cutlass, the ship for my voyage in command when I got the drift tree, the little silver man when I threw Chips at wrestling—a much better man than Bear Heliulfson.

And now that the danger was quite at an end from Katla's mischief, Tind Scarface being resolved on peace 'twixt Thorgest and my father, I felt quite young enough for a little sport. There could be not the slightest harm in a bout at boxing aboard a friendly ship. I had known Bear all my days without any thought of a quarrel.

I put my hands to my mouth, and hailed him—

"*Flying Dragon*, ahoy!"

He turned, saw me and grunted.

"I'm coming aboard of you."

My officers tried to stay me but there was something rather offensive in Bear's manner. I jumped into the dinghy and sculled oar-over-stern, as our way was, rounding under the ship's stern to drift down tide to Bear's gangway.

"Hello, Bear!" said I with a cheery grin, still expecting a welcome.

Bear turned haughtily to old Ulf his Steersman, and said over his shoulder—

"Just ask that boy what he wants?"

I was not quite pleased, being master of a ship with my men watching me.

"Bear Heliulfson," said I, so that all might hear in both ships, "the little boy wants to take you on at any sport, from hop-scotch to a holmgang." So I made fast my painter to his shield-strake.

The idea of a duel brought forth laughter from both crews, and Bear's guests opened the cabin door to listen. Steersman Ulf bade his master give me a sound thrashing.

"Bear Heliulfson," said I, "my dinghy against your tin hat. I'll box you to a finish. Come for a friendly round, man!"

As good sport was promised here as I had hoped for.

With full six years' growth ahead of me, Bear could afford to laugh, but having his guests and crew for witnesses, he could not afford to delay.

"Come for your medicine," he said, as if he grudged me the thrashing. "And look alive, I'm busy."

He should not have drawled or turned his back. He should have faced me while he took off his helm, for he who slights his opponent earns a beating. As it was, while I leapt from the shield-strake on board I jammed the helm down over his eyes, thus gaining time to take ground with my back to the sun. Before he had the helm clear of his eyes, a left hander caught him under the point of the chin, so that he did not feel quite well by the time we closed. All the same, that helm slung at my face did not improve my right eye or my temper.

Bear had been taking exercise mainly with his tongue, while I was hardened at man-work. He was in soft condition, I in training. He had not learned either to box or to wrestle. I had. Yet, with double my weight and strength and a foot of extra reach, he might have strangled me had I let him grapple for wrestling. My one chance was with fists, my only hope in keeping so near that his blows got me at half stroke, and not with his weight behind them. Moreover, I soon found that my own blows were too weak to interest him, he being in armour. Besides, the chain mail hurt my knuckles.

Instead of attempting to hit I slapped his face to force his temper, jeering him to blind passion past all control. So I goaded him until his breath failed and he was mad with rage, striking at the air while I dodged his blows. There were no rounds or pauses to take breath. Do what I would some of his strokes went home. My strength was ebbing fast. Then his lunges exposed him sidewise and I got home with an upward cut beneath his ear which felled him.

So far had all been done in sport, but now Bear's crew felt they were being disgraced, and were beginning to show ill temper, as I slung Bear's helm clanging into my dinghy. Steersman Smith had seen that danger coming before I left the *Fafnir*. By this time he and Patrick had our people into good byrnies of leather scaled with flakes of horn, and steel helms. The spear-sheaves, bows and quivers were got ready and the men were posted behind the larboard bulwark in the waist or used the stocks of cargo as a breastwork. The *Fafnir* was in readiness for battle.

On board the *Flying Dragon*, I set my bare foot on Bear's neck to keep him quiet while I drew his sword, and was turning to invite his crew to come on when they made a sudden charge. A squall of spears from the *Fafnir* drove them back to cover of the forecastle and the starboard shield line. But there they had their arm racks and were getting weapons.

Behind me in the cabin doorway stood the three gray sons of Thorgest, whom I had quite forgotten until Tind Scarface warned me to clear out before Bear awakened. Matters began to feel quite serious, beyond the edge of sport, for, easy as it was for him to give advice, I was afraid to move. So long as I stood amidships Bear's people could not launch weapons for fear of hitting Thorgest's sons behind me. So soon as I ran for the gangway they would launch their spears and get me. Nor could my people attack them while they were under cover. And Bear was getting restive. I scratched my head, for it was very awkward.

All of a sudden I remembered that father had left me a purse in case I needed money, and this was tucked in my belt.

Throwing Bear's sword into the dinghy I snatched from the purse a handful of silver and copper.

"To pay my footing," I shouted, and let fly with the money at Bear's people forward. For the instant they forgot that they would slay me. Some caught at the coins, some scrambled, giving me just time for my flying leap to the dinghy. There I was safe, well covered by my men, since not one of Bear's folk dared to expose himself. Both sides were shouting with laughter as I cast loose the painter, shoved off and took my oars.

"Thorgest's sons," I shouted, "and both ship's companies, I take you to witness that at Bear's challenge and on my wager—his helm against my dinghy—he fought me fair with fists in manly sport, so that by luck without the slightest malice I won his helm. And I take his sword for a keepsake."

Though my crew kept on guard and that of the *Flying Dragon* stayed in shelter both ships were in a gale of laughter when Bear came staggering over to his gangway and seized a spear which he let fly at me.

Seeing it come I ducked clear by a handbreadth, then stood up in the dinghy to yell at him:

"You cur! You dirty dog!"

Now Tind Scarface and his brothers laid hold of Bear to quiet him, but also they warned me to get back in haste to my ship else they would turn him loose. Aye, they were sportsmen, else had my life paid forfeit, so I pulled under our stern to haul along the shield-strake hand-over-hand to the gangway. There I had need of a moment to see what was passing ashore, for a body of horsemen at a romping gait came spurring down the vale towards Broadlair strand. I reckoned that my father had come with Slaying Stir.

There was no time to see more of that, for now at the gangway Patrick helped me on with my steel byrnie, saying that Bear waxed fractious. Spears came overhead like the first big drops of a rainstorm, and Smith was howling for me from the poop. I only stayed to get Bear's helm and sword out of the dinghy before I ran up the ladder to see what was wrong.

What with my byrnie to give me confidence, with Bear's helm and sword, and a fine black eye swelling up for my own enjoyment, I could not resist the joy of showing our people Bear's strut and swagger to the very life. I must call away my boat's crew just as Bear had done when he would go ashore. I must give his drawling voice:

"Oh, take that beastly boy away and drown him. Ask the boy what he wants! A holmgang? Impudence!"

By this time it blew a spear storm from Bear's *Dragon*, with sheets of arrows. In dead earnest I called to my men from the poop-rail bidding them hold fast. Ill could we spare our spears and arrows, and it was folly for us to fight a warship.

"Let them send weapons," I ordered, "gather all you can. Waste none of ours."

As they were pleased to obey me my inside glowed warm, and kept up a small purring like a cat as I practised Bear's unholy pomp, pacing across the poop. All the time I was busy watching the horsemen approaching. I ordered the dinghy away to meet Stir and my father at the beach, but my mind was set the while in a slow growing wonder at what went on aboard the *Flying Dragon*.

Under Bear's orders the starboard sheet block was being taken from the clew of the mainsail, and with its running tackle passed down into the jolly-boat at the gangway. What could that mean? The attack on our ship had ceased. Of greater import was the sending forth of this tackle from the warship. Why did Ulf run to the poop, and stand by the bollards of the after hawser?

In later days Patrick told me that while I purred, and mimicked Bear, he saw me turn ashen white, then halt to yell new orders to our men.

"After guard, if any of Bear's men attempts to board that six-oarer boat kill them at once! Fore-guard and main-guard, wait till I give the order, then slay every man who shows above their shield line. Bowsman, Frogan and Michael Craftsman, lay aft with the spare mooring stone."

Smith was quick to see my purpose, so I gave him charge to place the mooring stone.

I grabbed the speaking trumpet and hailed—

"*Flying Dragon*, ahoy!"

Their steersman, Fatty Ulf, came over to the poop rail giving me "Hello, Leif!" with a cherry disdain.

"Fatty," said I through the trumpet. "Are your folk stark mad?"

"Not as I knows on, Leif."

"Bring up your master."

"He bade me speak for him."

"Does he know," said I, "that the moon comes up at moonrise, this very night?"

Fatty took off his helm to burnish his bald pate with a red kerchief.

"An it rain not," he answered, sorely puzzled.

So I gained time.

"Look! Look!" I shrieked at him, pointing my sword at the waterline of his vessel.

"What?" he craned over to look.

"Your ship's bottom! All wet!"

I crowed a little, for Eric might come in time if I could hold these fools.

But now he saw that I was talking nonsense, and Bear was shouting at him to give over.

"You purpose," I said, "to man that jolly-boat, to take out the sheet block and tackle, to hook on to my mooring warp underneath my stern, while you slack off your hawser and haul on your sheet, and lay your ship aboard of mine, and grapple!"

Fatty was getting orders now from Bear. He stood up to hail me.

"We're putting out to sea!"

"Is that your best lie? Go to Loki!"

He dropped under cover.

"And give my greetings to Bear Heliulfson," I shouted. "Say I'm sending my dinghy with his helm and sword!" That stung! There were spears flying also. "Bear will send two officers to me as hostages before he lays his ship one fathom nearer mine!"

There was no more delay to be had, for Bear's people began a dropping shower of arrows to keep us under cover.

Now you shall see Bear's boat's crew leap over shields to man their six-oarer; but their first man—Thrain, a thrall—fell on the shield-strake, quieted by a spear which pinned him to the timber.

Smith sent that spear. A second man sprawled across the shields, not hurt much but bawling like a bull seal. A third man fell upon him, but rolled inboard crumpling. The fourth and fifth men bolted back to cover. None had reached the boat.

But where the ill-armed boat's crew failed, the second attempt to man the six-oarer was made by men I had counted upon as friends. Tind, Neal, and Gunnar, the three sons of Thorgest, in heavy armor not easily pierced, came down into the boat amid a hail of weapons. They were followed by Hrut the Big, and Hallstein Brynyulf's son, well armored and bearing shields to fend the oarsmen. Despite our utmost force, that boat's crew got under way, pulled smartly across into cover below our taffrail, and hooked their block to our hawser. If I allowed that, our ship was doomed, for by slacking their after hawser, and hauling upon the tackle Bear's people could lay their ship to ours, grapple, board, and capture us by sheer weight of numbers. This I had foreseen when I sought to gain time until my father came.

As the boat came under our stern, Hrut the Big reached up the heavy block, catching its hook over our after hawser. Already had I given my signal. My two bowsmen lifted the great moving rock by its slings, but they had to start it swinging to let it clear the taffrail. At the third heave they let go, and the stone crashed through the boat. Hrut was in time to grasp the hawser, but the three Thorgestsons and Hallstein Brynyulf's son went down with the sinking boat as it drifted away to seaward harbor. Heavily cumbered with armor they had no hope of swimming, and all four went down to their death, between the ships.

Hrut, swinging on the hawser with his legs dragged out by the tide, looked up at me as I leaned over the rudder.

"My mother," said he, "bade me swear not to get wet."

I had a spear at his throat.

"An you'd stay dry," said I, "unhook that block and tackle."

"That will I," said Hrut, and he let the block down splash into the water. "Now may I come aboard?"

Both ship's companies left cover to watch the issue.

"Come you as friend?" I asked.

"Aye, that I do!" said Hrut, as he swarmed up the hawser.

"You'll fight for us?" I asked.

"Aye," answered Hrut, "and keep my word with mother—from the waist upward."

So I helped him inboard with a boathook, and he took fealty to be my seaman.

During the minutes taken to get the hook off our hawser, my steersman and the boatswain had cursed me under their breath in the rudest language. Now that I had Hrut aboard, Smith set about to cast our after hawser off the bollards while Patrick, with tiller loosed from its lanyards, was putting the helm hard over. Thus, with stern released and rudder catching the tide, the ship would cant, swerving right round until she lay head up-stream, with the enemy two ship-lengths farther off on our starboard bow.

Now Patrick and Smith had used the sea, the one for fifty years, the other forty—ninety years in all. And I had used my brains these last few minutes. I stood on the hawser, so that if Smith cast loose he would throw me overboard.

"Who commands?" I asked.

"Get off that warp!"

"Are you commanding? Or do I command? Make fast again! Saving my ship, eh? So can Bear swing his warship down on us to foul and grapple, board and capture us. Get forward, Steersman, and know that I command. Your post is on the forecastle!"

He went away ashamed, and so did Patrick. But the harm was done, for in their folly my officers had shown Bear how, by dropping his own after hawser and setting his rudder hard over, he could make the tide swing his warship foul—to grapple, board and take us. He and Ulf were setting their afterguard to the work, while I led my afterguard to keep their poop under a cloud of flying spears and arrows. I drove them all to shelter, wounding three, but I knew well that our weapons were well-nigh used, the last spear spent and very few arrows left. To slip moorings and fly was hopeless with our slow ship, since in boarding they would outnumber us.

Then came our dinghy, thrusting between the ships, wherein Slaying Stir shield-guarded the thrall at the oars, and Eric stood in the stern sheets making a swift survey of the fight.

"Way!" he said. "Enough!" and the fighting ceased, for Eric and Stir were chiefs used to obedience. My father scarcely seemed to raise his voice, but both ships waited breathless.

"Leif!"

I brought Bear's sword smart to Bear's helm in salute. I remember well I had then a wad of raw steak lashed to my right eye, arrows hooked into my byrnie, and no doubt a grin. He called me a damaged sea-urchin afterward.

"Report!"

"Bear Heliulfson's *Flying Dragon*, sir, came in. I paid all proper compliments."

"Why, s-s-s-s-so I s-s-see!" quoth Stir, and our men laughed.

"Silence!"

Our men shut up at the sound of Eric's order.

"Warship ahoy!" he hailed the *Dragon.* "Who's in command?"

Bear came to the poop rails, a waesome, drooping figure, querulously threatening.

"Eric Thorwaldson," he wailed. "I cite you for blood guilt, I take witness that I summon you—and I do summon you with a lawful summoning to answer at Thorsness Thing, and if that fails me, before the All Thing, in the slayings of Thorgest the Old's three sons, of two seamen-partners and two thralls and an after boat and many wounded. I'll hound you to greater outlawry, you and your son, and your —— ship's company, and I shall—"

"Oh, s-shut up," said Stir, and Bear did so.

Eric saw dead Thrain pinned with Smith's spear to the shield-strake, then turned to me, asking what men had I lost.

"One gained sir," said I, and at that my people cheered.

Facing the other ship, Eric saw Fatty Ulf, his face like a moonrise from behind the shield-line.

"Steersman Ulf," he said. "Did your people attack, or did mine?"

Fatty took off his helm and his red stocking cap before he could scratch his head.

"Oh, aye," said he, "Oh, aye. 'Tis a bad business, master."

"Which side attacked?"

Here Bear must interfere, for he was captain, demanding, that if any man handselled this business, such judge should not be a party to the case. To that my father agreed. So Slaying Stir asked Ulf.

"W-which side attacked?"

"Well, it's like this yere, Stir. 'Fore we're through breakfast, this boy of Eric's comes, in a dinghy an all."

He seemed aggrieved that I should have come in a dinghy.

"And seeing he's just a boy, our old man had words with him. On that the young varmint boards us, and— Eric, you'd ought to tie him up next time you fares ashore. He's not safe loose."

Stir looked at me.

"Explain this," he ordered haughtily.

"When Bear insulted Eric's son," said I, "I took him on at boxing, my dinghy against his helm."

"Fair fighting?"

"Quite sir. My ship had Bear's folk covered."

"Which ship attacked?"

Bear shrieked:

"That ship attacked!"

"A cu-cu-cowardly, merchant craft attacked a big warship, eh?" so Slaying Stir stood silent awhile in study. "Then why," he asked mildly, "d-did you, Bear Heliulfson, set your gug-gug-grappling irons outboard while the chapman ship, if there be any irons, has them housed?

"Bear Heliulfson, I brand you as a liar. Moreover, if you look to the beach you shall see how you were held in talk until my Thing men and my friends could join me. Now, ere they man the boats I give you warning. Get you to sea or I'll sink you!"

CHAPTER X

THE GUESTING AT BROADLAIR

THE beaten warship made sail and slipped moorings, putting to sea with a dead thrall pinned to her shield-strake and such a mothers' meeting aboard of her that for a long time we could hear its argument go bickering away into a distant murmur. Well might the seamen partners accuse the master who lost a ship-sale because he drowned the buyers, who spent six lives and seven wounds in a boxing match with a fellow not half his size, who used a warship for attack upon a friendly chapman, who was defeated by strategies of a boy and put to shameful flight by words of an unsought umpire.

In the long course of this debate the neglected warship rested herself on some rocks, and sat thereon three days, expecting, no doubt, to hatch a covey of dinghies.

Moreover, these diversions of a ship's company led afterward to a curious expensive suit at law as to the partner-rights of Norway seamen in a Danish ship with an Icelandic master. Bear's folk dwelt on the south-western cape of Iceland, but their district court spent a year referring the suit up to the great All-Thing at Thing-valla, which ruled that the blood-suits should be heard at our own district assize in Broadfirth.

This third trial led to a non-suit because we, the defendants, had then ceased to be Icelandic citizens. If Bear had ever loved me his heart grew cold then.

At the departure of the *Flying Dragon* I had no time to jeer, for I was very busy. So many things were happening all at once. Yonder upon the strand was Slaying Stir, bidding his fifty men pasture their hundred horses upon Thorgest's mead, then make their camp for noon meat.

Father sent word to me upon the forecastle that he would see me aft. It so happened that one of our seamen partners, Snorri Swordson, had a spear through his shoulder, and I was cutting away the shaft. His brother Kimbi had come aboard from Stir's camp, and would pull the blade through the wound. We doubted the boy might die if we delayed.

On the fore-cargo Steersman Smith was tending his big son Hall the Hunter who had an arrow in the rump. Hall swore most horribly in proof that he had not turned his back on enemies.

Catface, son of our neighbor Aesir of Swine Isle, had a broken leg, and moaned a dirge until we should come to mend him. A fellow named Gils, the son of our farmer in Brok Isle, had a hurt nose so that the swelling arched up between his eyes, from whence came later his nickname Blinding-snout.

Most of us had slight hurts, but two who lacked them made little wounds for each other.

"What's the use," they said, "of claiming our ship beat a sea-dragon unless we show scathe for proof?"

My father sent word he would see me, and I returned a message. I was coming.

Word passed that all of our side who were chiefs by rank should call upon Thorgest Skinflint. We must tell him his sons were slain, and the slayer must claim the deed. We must bid him name his nine nearest neighbors, outside his blood kin, to render funeral honors, and thereafter sit as a jury on the inquest. We must tell him we dragged with grapnels for the bodies.

My father sent word he would see me at his judgment in the cabin.

Then somebody told me I was Mess Ward for the day, with dinner to cook at once. At that I remembered that Father wanted me. In fact I was not quite sure as to his greeting. Was I a victorious sea-captain or a bad boy with a black eye bandaged in raw steak? Since I did off my byrnie to dress wounds it might be seen that the shirt which Geirrid tore in the first fight at Mewlithe had been reft away in the argument with Bear. It had a shoulder left but the rest of me was bloody.

From the forecastle I went rather slowly along the starboard gangway, inspecting the fore-cargo stack, the heart-space abaft the mast, the after-cargo stack and the sliding door of the cabin beneath the poop. All that way clusters of men looked up from the surgeon work to cheer me, as did also Stir's people on the strand. The day was waning, I noticed, and in the after cabin it was dusk where my father sat in the judgment seat, his hands clenched over his walking stick, his forehead upon his knuckles. He looked up, and never have I seen a face so sad, so disappointed.

"My son," he said, "why have you ruined me?"

At that I sank down on my knees before him.

"I ordered you to keep the peace. You disobeyed me. Now must I thrash you for the disobedience, here."

But when he raised the stick I jumped to my feet at once.

"Not here," I shouted at him, and whipping off the belt, dropped my canvas breeks to the floor. "Thrash me to death," said I, "but not here, alone. Come upon the poop, so all men shall behold a sea-captain flogged for a sea-victory!"

"My son must not be shamed before the men."

"I am not ashamed. 'Tis you are shamed, doing here what you wouldn't do in the open!"

He sprang at me, but by that time I had slid past the cargo stack to the gangway.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"Swimming!" said I, and dived.

A swiftly ebbing tide swept me away past the boats which plied with men and stores to the camp. A little farther down stream was Slaying Stir with a ten-oarer boat just beached, from whence his people, who had dragged the harbor, were landing the bodies of Thorgest's three drowned sons and of the seamen who had perished with them.

Down from the house to meet these came two widows, and many children of the Thorgestsons, they, the neighbors and the servants, wailing for their dead. Up in the house door, full in the light of the sunset, stood Thorgest leaning on his sticks awaiting them. But down by the boat the sunset light was gone, and in the shadows a procession formed behind the bearers.

Midway between the campfires and the mourners I had found bottom and splashed up through shallowing water, stopping to wash off the blood I had from dressing wounds. The bandage over my eye had washed away, and what was left of my shirt, so that I stood quite naked save for my necklace and the red hair streaming like seaweed about my shoulders. I was no longer angry, or tired as I had been, but fresh, glowing from the sting of the keen tide, and hungry.

I looked back to the ship and there, in the light of the setting sun, I saw my father leaning upon his sword, his armor, beard and hair like one red glory. I seemed to feel his thoughts as he stood there watching me. I that had ruined him and made him outlaw must still be worthy of him. That is why I walked unarmed and naked up the beach until I stood directly in front of Thorgest. At sight of me he stood to his full height and came toward me, his eyes blazing. Behind him his three dead sons were being carried into the house. The air rang with the wails of the mourners.

"Thorgest," I said, "my father ordered me to keep the peace with your sons—I who have slain them. Now take my life and this is my atonement. So shall there be peace for my father's house."

He stood there staring at me while the blaze of madness in his eyes seemed to die down, and to go out until he was only a desolate old man. Then with his staff he drew a line all around me in the ground, while in a quavering, wailing voice he told his people to let no weapon hurt me, lest I be given a warrior's death and entry into Valhalla with his sons.

"The gods shall deal with you," he said, "not I."

After that he went into the house and I was left alone while night closed over me.

My whole religion was the prayer to Tyr for manly honor, the training to make me a warrior and the hard earning of fame. Now I had glory which would ring through Iceland and echo from the generations of my countrymen until in later ages men would still remember the boy Leif Ericson who, by sea strategy, with a weak merchant vessel defeated a strong warship, putting her to shame. Thereby he must have his father's outlawry, his mother's exile, the burning of his home and for his neighbors mourning and desolation. No motive had I for fighting, save my own vanity. Such vanity had led me to suppose that the shedding of my blood would make amends to widows reft of their husbands, children robbed of their parents, servants bereaved of good masters, Iceland in mourning for her sons.

Such was my worship of Tyr the god of Honor. Was Tyr a god that I should worship him? Or was he not a demon, the foul spirit of murder fed with blood of men and tears of women? I that had stoned Katla now cursed Tyr for witchcraft—and he was the only god I had ever worshiped.

Not for fear, but in pride had I left my father, resolving to be an outlaw, a baresark robber in the fells. But then I had come to Thorgest. To save my folk from ruin I offered self-doom. Was that in love for my people? Nay, it was pride which bade me seek Valhalla by the road of glory.

And Thorgest barred my way by some strong magic, drawing a ring all round me, to fend me alike from heaven and from men, leaving me there in the dark and the cold, shrinking, ashamed, afraid. Yes, terrified, changed to a coward! What was this man who wrought magic, who wrought forgiveness, that very cowardice which the Christians preach, bidding us shrink in fear from doing right justice and vengeance for our dead?

Then all of a sudden it was borne in upon me that this old Thorgest Skinflint, who must ever be wailing against the Christian gods, was secretly a Christian. This magic of his which was making a coward of me was some foul Christian spell!

At that I let out a yell which broke the spell of magic cast about me.

I ran between the housen, out upon the mead where grazing horses scattered on either side. Beyond was a clang of sheep bells, but now I came bare-footed on rough ground, stone-strewn where I had to walk, to pick my way, to grope under the edge of an old lava-flood, all ropy coils of rock-surf flung up in tumultuous breakers. There I perched upon a rock, but found the lava prickly, so I crouched down in glittering frosted grass under the sparkle of the star-strewn sky. And still I had not distanced or shut off the wailing at Thorgest's house. Out to the left Stir's people were sitting round their fires. Beyond glowed the ship's riding light, and above her were great stars burning the edges of the snow-fells.

NOT long had I been there with nought to do but shiver and bite my nails when some one came stumbling and blundering toward me, laden with a bundle upon his back and calling me under his breath as if he dared not shout. So came my young brother. This year past until today he had been at fostering in the house of Slaying Stir, to learn something toward manhood away from mother's hearth. Thorwald had come, he told me, from my father.

"Bear you these words," so ran my father's message, "from Eric to his first-born.

"I saw you swimming toward the fires, the supper, and the great welcome of Stir's people. Yet I knew you could not bear to have their praise while you still disobeyed me. You would go naked, hungry and alone rather than that.

Therefore I send your clothes to warm you and food to refresh you.

"I saw you go to Thorgest and offer self-doom. Much have I lost this day, but all I have may go, if only my son is spared. Therefore I send your byrnie, helm and sword.

"I saw you stand in the twilight not knowing where to go. Therefore I send you money to take you in comfort wherever you may fare.

"Yet if you go away take Thorwald with you, and my blessing also. Your mother and I will pray the gods to help you.

"But if you will return to take your punishment for disobedience, that you shall have in full and in sight of all men."

As he rendered each part of Eric's message, my brother gave me my clothes, the food, my arms and a bag of silver. I put on the clothes, ate the cheese and oatcakes, armed myself and tucked the bag of money in my belt.

"Which way do we fare?" asked Thorwald.

"Where is he?"

"On the poop yonder, waiting," answered Thorwald.

"Unless I bring you safe on board," said I, "you'll be hunted down and slain by Thorgest's men."

"He didn't say that," answered my little brother.

"The hunter," said I, "who sets a trap to catch his prey says nothing to warn the bait."

"Am I the bait?" he asked.

"Am I not trapped?" I answered, and so, skirting the buildings in stealth, we crept past the camp fires to where Thorwald had beached the dinghy. So we returned on board.

During the night as I rolled in my bunk and awakened I heard a whispering voice. In the thick darkness my father knelt, saying his prayers to Thor before he slept. Often had I known him to kneel in the darkness praying, but never before had I heard that broken voice as he pleaded mercy for his wife and sons.

WHEN morning began to dawn I got our ship's people armed, and my father led the whole of us ashore. At the same time, Slaying Stir saw to the proper arming of his men in camp. So the two forces joined, moving in order of battle, until we came before the main door of Thorgest's house and cried our summons. We were cold and grumbling, thrashing our arms for warmth. Stir and Eric stood for a long time in talk. I took my place in the circle which Thorgest had made upon the ground, where I began to strip off my arms and clothes, giving them to my brother.

For a long time Stir whispered in father's ear and the two began to laugh right merrily.

Many more horses had come into the mead since nightfall. Parties of Thorgest's friends were riding in from the fells while we waited. We watched them enter, and knew that the house must be full. Their force would outnumber ours.

"Oh, thou old fox!" cried Eric, slapping Stir on the back.

A mist lay on the land, now white with frost. All white was the big grassed house-roof until the red sun rose, flushing the snow-clad hills, the frosted fields and buildings.

Then Thorgest came out of his main door wearing the sealed armor and helm with great wide wings of a bygone age. Very bleak he looked, stern in his grief and stiff in his slow gait, as he brought out his people to form them facing us, well nigh seventy strong.

I threw off the cloak which had wrapped me, and stood naked, with Eric upon my right hand, Slaying Stir on the left.

"Thorgest," said Eric, "I give you greeting, and I come in peace. You and I had been right friends and neighbors until Katla the Witch, my enemy, so wrought her spells as to make ill blood between us. It was on Thor's day in last week that this my son Leif had part in stoning the witch to death, while in that very hour her magic came between us. An ill word of yours, neighbor, an ill deed of mine, for which I sorrow. Yet peace was all I sought, and you had no will to war.

"It was for that I rode to my friend Arngrim—" that was the birth-name of Slaying Stir— "and brought him here to handsell peace between us. For proof I should return, I left my ship here. Lest any wrong should befall, I left my son in charge with my strict orders that he should keep the peace between my folk and yours.

"But ere I could return Leif disobeyed my orders, and for that I bring him here so you see my justice done upon him."

Not in a father's punishment is a son shamed. In flinching is the disgrace, but in a manly bearing is there triumph. I lifted my hands palms upward to the skies, praying in silence to the All-Father above while I had such a thrashing as I never dreamed of. My flesh was slashed away, and the blood streamed until my father could bear no more. When we had finished, we clasped hands, standing together while Thorwald dressed my wounds. He was crying.

"Thorgest," said Eric, and his voice was breaking, "have I not proved my justice?"

"Nought," answered Thorgest, "care I for your justice. Come to our business."

"Then," said my father, "I cite yourself to witness that, ere the sun had set upon the slayings, Leif my son came here to where he stands and offered self-doom."

Thorgest's friends were murmuring now against him. He had not told them that I offered self-doom.

"Shall a boy's blood," cried Thorgest, "be reckoning for three men?"

My father whispered to me—

"Just watch how I bait this bull."

Aloud he said—

"Witness, all ye who hear me, that Thorgest speaks of my son as a boy, not as a man liable for his deeds."

Said Thorgest—

"I do summon you, Eric Thorwaldson, to answer at the Spring Court of the Thing at Thorsness for lawless slaying of my three sons."

"You summon me! Then is my son, who offered self-doom, free!"

"Aye! Aye! Aye!"

Both sides acclaimed me free, despite old Thorgest, who now would summon me also.

"Thorgest," said Slaying Stir, "b-b-bear witness that you r-refused the s-s-slaying of this boy."

Thorgest made the fact good, with furious oaths of vengeance against Eric.

"Then," said Stir, "b-b-by your own rede the boy stands free and guiltless."

"See," whispered Eric, "how a red rag draws off the bull. Now it shall show its paces."

"Witness all men," he cried, "that in the justice done to my son's body I took upon myself the burden of Leif's guilt."

"Aye, on yourself!" said Thorgest.

Eric whipped out his sword.

"Who comes?" he challenged. "For Thorgest's sake who comes? A holmgang! A holmgang! Who comes to avenge the dead?"

None cared for Thorgest enough to come against Eric the Red in combat. With a sigh he sheathed his sword.

"See, shipmates," he said, with seeming reverence, "how Thorgest the Old in his ripe wisdom cares nought for waste of blood, but in the very greatness of his heart stands here for widows and orphans. Not blood he claims, but silver!"

"To your last ounce!" cried Thorgest eagerly, and Slaying Stir winked at me.

"Trapped!" whispered Eric, and we watched Thorgest's friends drawing away from a man who would sell blood for cash and barter away the honor of dead sons.

"He'll rally them," whispered Eric, and was right.

"Not only silver do we claim," so Thorgest rallied his followers, "but the divison amongst us of Eric's cattle, thralls, lands, housen chattels and shipping, the general forfeiture of all his goods in greater outlawry."

"Now," whispered Eric, "Stir takes the bull by the horns."

"Hark to the d-dear old man," said Stir, with his kindly chuckle. "Are you, of Thorgest's part, agreed on this?"

"Yes." "Aye." "Agreed!" "We stand to that."

Stir seemed disheartened, I thought he was even pleading.

"Why, n-neighbors," he said, "Eric has ever been an easy merchant with us, quick to give credit, slow to call in debts. Many of us have counted on his friendship, had his help in trouble. Would you drive him to greater outlawry?"

As Stir seemed to retreat, Thorgest and his people were joined as one man in claiming vengeance to the uttermost.

"Oh, well," said Stir, resigned as though he had forsaken Eric's cause. "In such a c-claim as this," he added as an afterthought, "of c-course you know that ere the spring meeting of the Thing Eric must pay into c-c-court all that he has."

"Such is the law," said Thorgest, now triumphant.

"From which the court will render money in p-pup-payment for each man slain or hurt."

"I'll see to that," said Thorgest.

"All of you will have recompense," Stir yawned, "that is at least for p-proven loss. As to the rest of you who had no loss, yet seek to share Eric's g-g-goods among yourselves—"

"Who made you party to this case?" yelled Thorgest.

"M-m-me? Oh, well, since you drive Eric to c-co-collect at once such little s-sums in lump and usury as you do owe him, neighbors, you will pup-please deal with me as the coc-collector. Oh, don't blame me! Render your t-thanks to Thorgest!"

In Thorgest's following now was the wildest uproar. Because of his icy avarice in matters of loans, of mortgages, and credit upon merchandise, the whole of the Wood-strand farmers had brought their business, these several years past, to easy-going Eric. He had become their only banker. So when old Thorgest rallied them, to make Eric bankrupt and thus escape their debts, they cried the law against him in suit for the greater outlawry. All that seemed safe and easy until Arngrim, the terrible Slaying Stir, turned of a sudden lawyer to bring them to book on their own suit, and collector to call in their debts both principal and interest.

Being Icelanders, law-loving, litigious, law-ridden Icelanders, to whom dishonesty seemed worse than death and bankruptcy a form of suicide, they had no thought of fighting their bad case. And who among them dared to face the smooth, cool, deadly smile of Slaying Stir! I saw men's faces turn white and shrunken so soon as he spoke of their debts. Thorgest's own brother walked away muttering somewhat about the cows to milk. Some sneaked off behind the house. Some argued among themselves. Three or four came shamefaced to join our side. The rest of them rallied round Thorgest, to shake their fists in his face.

"Bait him a little more," my father whispered; and Stir spoke again.

"As Thorgest says, my f-friends, such is the law, that you shall p-pup-pay your debts, I'll see to that!" he chuckled, and from our side came a roar of joy.

"P-p-peace!" Stir lifted his hand for silence. "L-l-let me go on. Yes, you p-p-pay your debts, while Thorgest g-g-gets the gelt—he'll see to that!"

Gibes from our seamen, yelps from Stir's farmers, and a gust of cheering before he got peace once more.

"C-come now, good neighbors of Woodstrand, as to these little sums; Thorgest will lend you money to repay them."

Thorgest tried to back away, but his neighbors held him while Stir baited him.

"Oh, wo-won't you, Thorgest? Why, of course you will. You l-led them into this; you'll see them through. Eh, Thorgest—generous, spendthrift, gold-scattering Thorgest Bounteous! Three cheers for gold-wasting Thorgest, Chief of Woodstrand!"

My father whispered—

"Now watch Stir throw the bull."

Stir walked among Thorgest's broken

followers telling them to stand clear that they might see the old chief pay their debts. The word passed on till Thorgest stood alone and Stir came to him right briskly, rubbing his hands.

"Now, Thorgest," he said in his cheeriest way, "my client tells me you owe him for last year's merchandise three hundred wad-mal. So you shall s-s-set a g-good example by sending into your house and weighing me here and now the bags of silver. Nay, please!" He took Thorgest quietly by the wrist. "D-d-don't go, I pray you, but send into the house. I shake your hand."

"Let go!" yelled Thorgest.

"Close round, you fellows," said Stir. We began to come between Thorgest and his men.

"W-w-won't you come aboard the ship?" asked Stir, "to taste the ale, eh, Thorgest? See, this way—"

"Help! Help! A rescue!"

But Thorgest saw his men turn their backs upon him.

"I'll pay!" he moaned.

"Thorgest will pay!" cried Stir. "For all of you."

"I never said that!" whined Thorgest.

"Oh, didn't you? Tut-tut. Well, neighbors all, I have to tell you that while your best f-f-friend Thorgest weighs out loans of silver for all your debts to Eric, my fifty friends and I with our hundred horses are guesting here at B-b-Broadlair."

"Nay! Nay!" shrieked Thorgest.

"We are Thorgest's guests," cried Stir, "to drink the funeral ale, to lay the Thorgestsons in howe, to build a cairn—yes, Thorgest, the sons whose blood you sold for Eric's gelt."

"This shall not be!"

"Then must we fire the house to render the ancient funeral rights by b-b-burning!"

And so this came to pass that, for two days during the funeral honors of Thorgest's sons, Broadlair was held to ransom, while Thorgest and his neighbors paid their debts to Eric, according to the law which they had claimed. Right glad was Thorgest to be out of debt to my father, and to speed Stir's parting.

Now came we to the ship, delayed in Broadlair haven these two days, while the increasing cold added each hour to our peril of being ice-bound. Until Stir was ready to spare us we could not clear for sea, but we dared not stay to winter at Thorgest's mercy. At last as dusk closed over the second day Stir came aboard to tell us all was finished.

"Oh, you old fox!" cried Eric, slapping him on the back.

"'T-t-tis well begun," said Stir. "N-now, Leif, get you the silver out of the dinghy quick."

"Nay." Eric stayed me. "Take half ashore again, a gift to your men from me."

Stir took me by the ear.

"Leif," said he, "when you get home, go tu-tell your mother that Eric is grown up. She need not keep that slipper to b-b-beat him with. Now Eric, wit you well this is a bargain for you. For now will my people be right well content to go with me guesting from end to end of Broadfirth at every stead where money is due to you. By this example we have set at Broadlair we shall not need to wait at any house for payment. Debtors who hear our coming will make haste to borrow cash or goods for settlement. That, or we stay as g-g-g-guests!"

"You'll do this for me?"

"More. We shall rally not only your wealth, but likewise all our friends. You'll need them sorely at the Thorsness Court."

He looked at our useless cargo.

"Take this cargo," he said, "to Bearhaven. Leave it for me in care of my brother's wife. Lend me that thrall of yours, Michael the craftsman, to winter at Bearhaven. He shall carve his Christian demons into good Norse. Then shall I give this house gear in bribes to win over the chiefs who are Thorgest's kinsmen."

"Snorri the Priest?"

"Yes, Eric, and Thord the Yeller."

"Now I begin to see, dear friend, that you may save me."

"That will I."

So they shook hands at parting, and Stir sculled ashore with the silver to greet his people while I got the ship under weigh for the run to Bear haven.

Hear now the chantey as our seamen tailed on the hawser.

Yet I have a biting conscience that bids me confess that this Nidaros lay was not in use for fifteen years to come. King Olaf moved the Chepe on Trandheim's Fiord from Hladir to the Nid, and Nidaros became his capital. Still, the Nidaros Chantey will serve well enough, for I forget the others.

Heave short the mooring-stone—it's yo! heave! ho!
Short while she yaws my lads—and so, heave, so-o-oh!
Walk her up thar!
Hawk her up thar!
B'lay there! to break her!
Now, with a will my boys—and up she'll go!
It's square away for Nidaros!
Beer and mead in Nidaros!
And yo! heave! ho!

Ran's hoarding gold below thar! Yo! heave! ho!
Save all your gold for Ran—and so, heave so-o-oh!
Wake up Ran thar!
Shake up Ran thar!
Grasping an' a-hoarding
Ran strips the sailor man, so, up she'll go!
It's square away for Nidaros!
Kiss them girls in Nidaros!
All get drunk in Nidaros!
And yo! heave! ho!

Ran's married Aesir—and it's yo! heave! ho!
Aesir founders fleets for Ran—and so, heave so-o-oh!
Wake up Aesir!
Shake up Aesir!
Hold her thar, and o-o-ver!
Coil you down the hawser, and away, we'll go!
Halliard haul for Nidaros!
Aft the sheet for Nidaros!
Ease the helm for Nidaros!
And eastward ho!

CHAPTER XI

THE REDE OF HILDA

FIFTEEN miles west of Broadlair were the jaws of Hvammsfirth. The southern teeth belonged to Eric, and the northern teeth to Aesir of Swine Isle. As we drove between, before a strong easterly wind which forced us to reef down, Father had a whim that he must call on Aesir, and so shoved off in the dinghy through a blinding snow squall, taking big risks of being swamped. Left in command of the ship, I took the channel between Sugand's Isle and Thorsness and ran southwest for Bear Haven. Thanks to Hunki, the increasing moonlight helped. Smith would always have it that the Boy God favored me.

How queer it is to think that Hunki and Bil, those little rescued slaves who tended the waxing and the waning moon, should outlive the dead gods of our fathers, and their slavery be remembered in the stave of Jack and Jill!

The sword-storms at Mewlithe and the arrow hail at Broadlair had changed me utterly from boy to man. Our black-avised, grizzled Steersman would scowl when I gave him orders; Patrick kept his shifting, sparkling blue eyes alert on all my doings, as if I should go wrong!

Yet Steersman, Boatswain, Carpenter and Bowsmen obeyed, readily as our seamen. I was pleased, and after the unlading at Bear Haven gave them a watch below until we could catch the flood for our run up-channel. Stir's brother, Worm the Slender, was away overseas with Arin of Mewlithe, but his people brought us warm ale when they gave us God-speed. We left Michael Craftsman mourning on the beach, ruth to be at the mercy of Slaying Stir, who had a short way with thralls.

Aesir's son, young Catface, who had a broken leg in the sea fight, needed much better care than we could give him on that rough passage, so I was eager to get him home to Swine Isle. But now the north-easter made us a strong head-wind besides the head sea, and the fearful tide-race was pouring through shallow channels cumbered with drift ice. Three whole days we lay waiting tides, or strained at oars in back-waters to make that fifteen miles. We knew well that when the wind dropped the channel ice would lock for the winter. What then should we think when at last, laboring into Swine Isle anchorage, we found Aesir's twelve-oarer and ten-oarer cutters, wolf-headed *Fenris* and *Mani* of the moon prow not only unhoused and afloat, but full of men who dighted them for sea! Catface explained that Aesir his good sire went mad at times. Surely nobody but a lunatic would dight such craft on the last day of open water.

In an ill mood at sight of such folly I beached old *Fafnir* lightly, and was rigging gang-planks to get Catface ashore when I saw his father and mine come down from the house to greet us. Locked arm in arm as if they had been drinking, they floundered through breast-high drifts in whirling snow. Good greeting had I when I ran down the gang-planks to meet them, for Aesir gave me a little golden ship to hang upon my necklace as trophy of the sea fight. I told them both pretty roughly that when the wind fell the channels would lock for winter, so there was no time for any foolery if we would get the *Fafnir* home and housed. The two men laughed, and when they carried Catface to the stead I would not go with them lest time be wasted, but fumed as I walked to and fro under the ship's bows and sulked most wretchedly. I had not sense enough to note how the snowfall was warming the air.

Presently came Eric and Windy Aesir down from the house again, pelting each other with snowballs.

"See you not," said Eric, catching me in the face with a double handful, "that the snow packs warm, because the gale breaks into squalls? How then shall the channels freeze in a thaw, eh, Captain?"

That lesson in sea-craft was enough to tame young pride.

"Now, Leif," cried Aesir, "get your father to sea before I am quite ruined with his bargains."

With left hand on Aesir's shoulder, and right hand clutching Aesir's belt, my father locked with him for wrestling.

"So!" They swayed. " 'Ware Aesir!" said my father. "Keep you to windward of him. A very Jew!"

"Viking, how's that?" Aesir tripped him, coming down on top. "You robbed me of four strong thralls and two good boats and silver enough to ballast them—yes, Leif, by Thor he did!"

In a smother of snow they wallowed like two ice-bears until Eric at last came uppermost, sitting on Aesir's head while he got his breath.

"The Jew," he panted, "hath swindled us out of our island farms, the housen and most of the stock in trade, so please you, for these two sea-coffins, four cripples and a bag of coppers."

"Liar!" quoth Aesir in a muffled shriek.

"Vulture!" said Eric, and the struggle began again, a whirl of arms and legs in the loose drift.

Scant patience had I with child-play as I thought of our home sold over mother's head. Now it stood real before my eyes that when the district court passed judgment in the spring we should be outlaws with no place for refuge. And these two boats? I judged them good for fuel!

Eric and Aesir sat side by side in the drifts, my father pointing at me.

"Didn't I tell you," he said, "that Leif will be gray before I'm grown up? Well—" he scrambled to his feet—"never you mind, Leif. We'll get the ship home somehow. You shall command the boat *Fenris*, and your big captive Hrut may take the *Mani*."

So we parted with Aesir and got the three vessels out, borrowing men for the run. The moon was at full, the wind and the tide in favor, and the ice kept open. Lucky it was for us, too, that Eric's creek, having no fresh water, is the last place frozen in Broadfirth. We made our passage.

At sight of our coming with three vessels instead of one, mother had the housefolk to work making fires and soup. Yet when we had the ships housed, and father and I went seeking mother she was not in the house. She had gone alone to the bower, where we found her as she wrought at the loom by torchlight, keeping her back to us. So she braced herself to bear ill tidings bravely.

"Get it over," was all she said, as she drove the weft home thread by thread down the warp.

Right glad were my father and I at the warmth of the little fire to shed our oilskins and leather clothes, to scrape the ice from our faces. We found milk and when we had a draught rubbed the rest on face and hands to soften the harsh skin. But all the time we were dreading what must be said.

"Get it over," said Mother sternly at her weaving. "Think you I'm made of iron to bear this waiting?"

So I unfolded the tale of the slayings at Mewlithe and of Katla's death.

"You've tuned the harp," said Mother. "Now the music."

There Eric took up the tales from Katla's sowing of evil betwixt himself and Thorgest to where he rode in search of Slaying Stir.

"Small sparks breed mighty fires," said my mother. "And such a spark is Stir."

On that I told of how I fought the ship. I seemed once more in the thick of the spear-storm.

"So ducklings needs must play at ducks," said mother harshly.

Father told the story of my self-doom, of Thorgest's summoning, of Stir's collection of debts due to us, and how the boats were bought for our escape.

Still the loom clacked and clanked. Through all the telling we had watched my mother, dark against the torchlight, swept by a great storm in waves of hope, angry surmise, impatient expectation, grim fierce triumph, rage, grief, despair.

In sick suspense we had gone from stage to stage of the tale, longing for her approval to make each deed seem just, while in the very telling our own sense accused us until we both saw clearly our terrific error in sending Slaying Stir to enrage every household in Broadfirth. When all was done we waited for mother to suddenly turn and rend us. But who has ever guessed what a woman will say or do! Still she went on with her weaving, but now, to the clack of the loom, sang staves of the nonsense songs used when she rocked the cradle getting her bairns to sleep.

"The cat capsized the milk,
And some one's hanged the cow,
So if the sheep have all got drowned
We'll have to eat the sow.
To-whit! to-whoo!
What can a house-wife do?
Who lacks a seal or goat or hound
Has got to eat that sow!

"Hoots man!" she said, laughing with a catch in her voice as the loom clacked, "So that's all!

"The fire hath caught the roof
The floods are rising yet.
And if the waves wash out the flames
I think we may get wet.

"Tut tut! Here's Thorgest's fifty Woodstranders a-howl for vengeance, bless 'em! Here's my fond grandsire, Thord the Yeller, with ninety good men moaning for our blood. Here's Snorri the Priest, who likes a bit of slaying when it's safe, and a hundred Thing-men to catch us in an ambush. Then Stir brings all our customers about our ears, and lest we feel dull withal, young Bear will burn us out with sixty men. Why worry?"

"A bear is in my bed,
He's howling out for meat.
I wish my good man would fare home
For I'm not fit to eat.
Whooo-whoo! Whoo-whoo!
What can a poor wife do?
Now if my good man doth not come—
What can that ice-bear eat?

"Man Eric, you've made a pretty kettle o' fish. In so short a time, too! Perhaps 'tis well you're home.

"We did it to annoy,
We did it for a whim.
And if we're hunted off the land
Of course we've got to swim.
Boo-hoo! Boo-hoo!
You're wrong whate'er you do
So ere you're hounded down the strand
Be sure you've learned to swim."

At that she turned on us with her gay chuckle.

"Cheer up!" she chirped. "We've got

the finest luck in the world. Think, Eric, when you were steersman out there beyond the Main Sea, athwart the main ice, over by the berg-stream, what saw you?"

"Mountains! Land!"

"Why greet, then, for spilled luck? Who else in Iceland, outlawed for slaying men, knows such a place of refuge? We shall make so good an exile, Eric, that men will count it triumph!"

So raised in her that mighty valor which was worth more than many men to us in the coming days of trouble. Her voice singing the nonsense rhymes is by far the sweetest memory of my boyhood.

"So-ho! Ho-ho!
You want the rent we owe?
When folk are driven from good homes
There's likely to be snow."

It was the custom that any household menaced by great danger should spare enough fuel for a bale-fire to bring in the neighbors; so when the channel ice could be safely crossed we kindled a tar barrel on the hump of Axe Isle. On that our neighbors, tenants and freed men began to assemble from their farms, sheep-folds and fisheries in our isles until our stead was thronged.

Now it so happened that Bear's father, Easy-all Heliulf, had come from Reykaness, the south-western headland of Iceland to confer with Snorri the Priest at Temple Garth in Thorsness about the blood suits pending against Eric. When the news reached him of a bale-fire kindled, he came across with dog-train and sled from the mainland. At his calling my father went to the main door asking him frankly whether he came in peace.

"Now that depends." Easy-all wriggled out of his carriole, and came waddling to shake hands. "Have you a decent fire?"

"Aye, and a right good welcome."

"Plenty to eat?"

"A fat horse sacrificed, for this is our autumn feast."

"Ale?"

"Old mead."

"With these things I have no quarrel," answered Heliulf, loud-spoken and wheezy with good living as he rolled in through the doorway. "I hear that your son and mine have fallen out, snarling like two puppies at a bone. Well, well, we'll form a ring, and see good sport, eh, neighbors? Bear had swelled head, I hear, and Leif did cure him. Fine lad they say and a right chief in the making. Oh, this is Leif, eh? So you're the lad who taught my son his manners.

"But what's all this about bale-fires? Want to make war on poor old Easy-all Heliulf? Not if I know it! Eric, I call off my Bear and you call off your fire-eating Leif. Or shall we let them fight? It's all the same to me. And you bloodthirsty islesmen, an' you want peace, go home, kiss your wives and bid them give you lessons in common sense."

He lumped into the high seat, greeting mother, panting as he cracked jokes. By this time half our men, insured of peace, were packing up, minded to go to their homes.

"Most welcome," said mother, presenting the silver horn with mead. "So you come from your son to handsell peace with Eric?"

"Nay, nay," he wagged his finger at her, speaking so softly that no one else could hear. "When decent folk are abed my Bear sits up all night hating Leif Ericson. I came to warn you. Lady, beware of murder! All Broadfirth comes against you to burn this house!"

"And so," said Mother aloud, "to make our murder sure you would disperse our guard!"

With a gay laugh she summoned our men about her to hear Heliulf's jest.

"Tell them the joke," she said, "as you told me!"

Easy-all squatted, cracking his finger-joints.

"The jest," he said with a sly smile, "was for you alone, dear lady."

"Hear then the jest from me." My mother still laughed, but her voice rang hard as she repeated Heliulf's warning word for word. "'Ware murder! All Broadfirth comes against you to burn this house!"

"Oh! How could you, Hilda!" said Heliuf, grieved and shocked. "Nought have I heard of such gossip!"

Mother drew back amazed at this guest who made her seem to her people as one who spreads false rumors, provoking war.

"There, there," said he, stroking her hand, until she plucked it away. "We all do make mistakes."

Blind with rage, she ordered him out of her house. So now all men might see that she wrought mischief.

But while this happened, my father, smelling treachery, had seen Heliulf's dog-train back into harness. Now he came running from the door.

"What, must you go? Well, Heliulf, tell Bear all that you've heard of our plans. Tell Thorgest we have a hundred men on guard. And tell all Broadfirth how we watch for spies!"

Now some of our men rallied and Heliulf saw drawn swords. He took his leave in haste.

The mischief was well done. Most of our people were getting ready to go, and if they went our cause was wholly ruined. It was just then that Michael Craftsman, coming on skis across the ice from Slaying Stir's house at Lava, stole through the women's door. My father was near that doorway hurriedly throwing on his robes, for only as Priest could he hold our men together. At sight of Michael he called out pretty roughly—

"What brings you here?"

Michael went down on his knees and said, in his broken Icelandic:

"I have come home. I fled from Stir. He slew a thrall—a spy of Heliulf!"

Men pricked their ears at that, while my father asked him—

"Doth Stir slay freemen, think you?"

"Nay."

Eric lifted the thrall to his feet.

"Freeman," saith he, "get you back to Stir, and tell him I had a spy here also, Heliulf himself. Then tell Stir I need you here, and come back home."

Two other of our thralls Eric called out from the crowd of men, and they also were given their freedom in honor of the gods.

It was then that Aesir arrived with his dogtrain from Swine Isle, windy Aesir uproarious with his greeting.

"I see," he shouted, "Heliulf stealing off dragging his tail i' the snow. I warned you that fox would come spying. Gat he any tidings? Nay? Eh, but he did though! A thrall of yours is with him now, and silver passes between them. A secret, furtive, wizened-looking thrall —a swine-herd."

"Shipmates," my father gathered our men about him. "I beg you not to slay and waste this Sty-ward, but rather tell him news from day to day of this or that man added to our support, especially of chiefs that are reckoned to be our foes. That news will spread fear among our enemies. We do not want them here to burn us in our house."

So by happy chance Eric won back his failing strength of men.

TO BE CONTINUED

The Camp-Fire

A free-to-all Meeting-Place *for* Readers, Writers *and* Adventurers

OUR Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The spirit *of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.*

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

THOUGH I've already explained that henceforth Mr. Cox is to be chairman of our Camp-Fire meetings, being now in general charge of all our departments as managing editor, I want the pleasure of formally presenting to him the pine-knot we use as gavel—as formally, at least, as we do anything at Camp-Fire—and of once more wishing him all the pleasure and friendship from the position that he will deserve and that I know you will help him get.

Comrades—such of you as don't already know him—meet Joseph Cox. He's all right all the way through. And now move over, somebody, and let me sit down among you.—A. S. H.

THANK you. I hope that the smoke won't blow into any one's eyes, and that the logs I carry from the wood-pile to the blaze will make it burn as brightly as before. Because it will be—with the help of all of you—the same old wood-pile. And I promise you that there will be no nigger in it.

Perhaps it may be well to say that the last sentence above is meant purely as a figure of speech. Camp-Fire, as you know, makes no distinction of race, color or creed, but every once in a while some one feels called upon to take offense at a statement here or in our fiction that was meant to be perfectly fair and free from malice. A. S. H. has left me something on the subject that needs very much to be said. So I am going to let him say it now—

"Ought to be used to them by this time, but they always irritate a little because they are so utterly unreasonable and illogical and so painfully narrowminded. I mean these people who are always finding in our, or some other, magazine an imagined slur on their nationality, religious belief or something or other. If the villain of a story is a Swede or Italian, a Catholic or a Protestant, they take it as a deliberate, cold-blooded insult to that race or belief, part of a systematic hostile propaganda. It never occurs to them to consider all the other races or beliefs who've furnished villains for our fiction. Somebody has to be the villain and it isn't fair to make Americans do it all the time. It never occurs to them that a fiction magazine, if for no other reason, would not needlessly alienate readers by campaigning against a race or a religion. In fact, nothing occurs to them except that by shaking with cooked up rage a bit they can shake the chip off their own shoulders.

"Here's one of the breed, though he finds his injury in a different way. His type is found in every nation—the noisy, boosting, inconsiderate American who makes a braying ass of himself in foreign countries and then complains loudly over the treatment he gets and deserves is another specimen of the type. This chap complains that *Adventure* more or less habitually gives Australians unfriendly treatment. He is either a fool or a liar and there are plenty of Australians who will back me up in saying so. It would be hostile to them, however, if they were all like this one. It is hostile to that type of American.

"Some of you have told me not to give them space, that they and their arguments are not important. The trouble is that they and their arguments *are* important. These are the stuff that wars are made of. They are not only foolish but criminally foolish, and the more they are held up to ridicule, the better for the world.

"This specimen, for example, creates his little share of international ill feeling by getting excited over the tremendously unimportant question of who can shear the most sheep in a day. Multiply him by hundreds of thousands on both sides of the water and multiply this one fool question by a million others and you have a real hostility between two nations. All made out of nothing plus narrow-mindedness and lack of horse-sense.

"Some day people are going to wake up to the fact that history is largely shaped by very little things.

"Here's his solemn contribution to international unpeace:

Sydney, N. S. W., Australia.

I am a shearer and I happened to pick up an old issue of the *Adventure*. There is a tale in it by Frank Robertson about shearing. If it is anything new to him, we shearers in Australia think nothing of shearing 200 to 275 per day, not for a few months but for nine and ten months at a stretch. We have shearers in Queensland, that is in the north of Sydney from where I am writing, that shear up to 200,000 per year. And that is only one of the many. The reason that prompted me to write at all is one passage—"They tell me over in Europe if a shearer gets over 50 head a day he holds a celebration." Well, let me tell you also, Frank Robertson, that we have boys that do that the first year out and that is on a 44-hour week. If you want to verify my statement, write to the Finily Sheep Shearing Co., Margret Street, Sydney, N. S. Wales, Australia. They have men that shear eleven months out of the twelve and think nothing of it. I have read articles before in *Adventure re* Australia and you people over there must think we are goats or something. Hoping you will let Frank Robertson know what at least one Aussi thinks of his taste.—G.

In Mr. Robertson's reply note that in mentioning a weak point of two other nationalties he includes Americans in the same condemnation. He, too, is objecting to a type—a type found in all nationalities.

Salt Lake City, Utah.

I am returning G——'s letter herewith. Where he can find any slam at the Australian shearers in "The Long-striker" is beyond me. I wrote a story of Western American shearing as I knew it to be. I mentioned that in Europe and in the East that fifty head a day was considered good shearing, and that's a fact because conditions are different and not because the men are better out here. Maybe they shear more sheep in Australia than they do from Arizona to Montana, but if so it's because conditions are different.

In the story itself I emphasize many of these conditions. There is the difference in sheep for one thing. A shearer can shear at least a third more Shrops, for instance, than he can Merinos. A country where there is a heavy dew-fall also cuts down the average. The amount of oil in the fleece has its bearing. It's simply a case where comparisons won't work. In England and in the East there is no open range and farm shearing of necessity has to be different. The wool has to come off when it gets hot and so the shearers get little practise. Australia, of course, is a range country and I don't doubt G——'s figures in the least except his remark that they shear eleven months in the year. All my experience with sheep has been that the wool has to be got off before hot weather. What kind of a climate have they over there anyway? I claim that to be exaggeration.

There was no claim made that *Owen Davis* was doing better shearing than other people could do. The story hinged on the shearing he could do in spite of the obstacles placed in his path by the San Pete gang. It was good shearing, as good as any Anzac could do under the same circumstances. I thought I had made myself clear in the note that was published in "Camp-Fire" in the same issue. I quote the first paragraph.

"There'll probably be fellows rise up and say that such shearing can't be done. I've worked in and around shearing corrals for years and I know that it's remarkable shearing, but not sensational. Many shearers have done better than *Owen Davis's* best mark of 259. The hard part of his task was to hold to an average of over two hundred a day month after month—yet other men have done it. . . ."

Friend G—— is obviously one of those intense nationalists who are always looking for some offense against their country. Thinking that they are always a little better than anybody else, they have to be constantly on their dignity. Poor souls, I pity 'em. At the same time I realize their power for harm. It is these professional chip-carriers who are largely responsible for race hatreds and all their consequences which usually have their culmination in war.

It doesn't matter a —— to me what G—— thinks of my story, but it does rile me to be accused of trying to run down another country than my own. It is a cardinal point of my creed that you can't judge any man by his nationality. I never had a more loyal friend than an old, withered Mexican sheepherder. The best friend I have today—the one that is always ready to go down in his pocket for me in case of need, asking no security but the bond of friendship, is a Portuguese, Azores born. I have never met a Cousin Jack, for instance, who didn't try to tell me how much better everything was done in his country. The same goes for the few Anzacs I have met. I can forgive them because I know so many of my own countrymen who believe that one American can lick ten greasers and, until the late unpleasantness, held the same opinion about the Germans and every other foreigner. It's a rather common human weakness, but it's one of the few, thank God, which I don't happen to have.

I would be rather glad if you would print this in "Camp-Fire." G—— says he has read other slams against Australia in *Adventure*. I don't believe it because I know the magazine doesn't stoop to that sort of thing. But maybe this might serve to draw some of the poison out of some of these international prejudices.—Frank C. Robertson.

IF *ADVENTURE'S* newer readers want the cream of our magazine's best stories through some fifteen years they will find in the volume "*Adventure's* Best Stories — 1926" eighteen that are at least of the best. The book is published by the George H. Doran Company, New York.

SIX-MASTED ships. Gordon Young's query and the answers it has already had from Camp-Fire comrades brings in still more letters. First, Captain Rotch comes forward in good Camp-Fire fashion to say that the ships he mentioned as having six masts had only five:

Seattle, Washington.

I have wanted to write, but have put it off from time to time.

Now that Brother Dingle takes a fall out of me in the current issue, this gives me an excuse.

The Skipper is right. The list of vessels I gave in answer to Mr. Young's question are five-masted ships and barks. The only thing is that he is several months late with his call down. *Adventure* had been on the stands only a few hours when I met several of my salty friends. "Say, Rotch! how do you get that way? Don't you know that there are no six-masted square-riggers?" I scratched my head and, picking the splinters out of my fingers, got down my Lloyds and looked them up, and if I had done this before I had written the letter I would have been saved a deal of trouble answering my friend's questions.

You notice I say, "Bark." Bark she is. Barque is the English of the word. You don't hear of a barquentine, do you? Nay, she is a barkentine.

When Captain Dingle sells you a story you don't send him a cheque, although that is the way the Captain would spell it; you send him a check. In England he would labour to get colour in to his stories, but in the U. S. A. we labor, color and honor. When I read the above I smile, and hope the good wife who labors to correct my stories doesn't see it, for as a speller I am a darn good brickmaker. Old Man Chaucer and I are in the same boat when it comes to putting a bunch of letters together to make words. My wife says I spell by ear.

Anyway, my apologies to *Adventure* and my regards to Captain Dingle, who can sure write a sea story.—Francis Rotch.

CAPTAIN ROTCH'S (seems to me he jumped on us once for calling him "Captain;" I can tell by what he does to us this time) admitted trouble with the alphabet probably accounts for *Prussian* vs. *Preussen* as mentioned in the following letter. But how do you account for the mystery of the *Marion G. Douglas?* It sounds like another *Marie Celeste*.

New York City.

In Mr. Francis Rotch's answer to Mr Gordon Young *re* six-masted ships, he quotes a six-masted German ship *Prussian.* Now I never heard of any ship with that name. But I have both seen and heard of a five-masted German full-rig *Preussen,* supposed to have been the biggest full-rig ship afloat, that is before 1910, as she went down outside Dover, England, some time during the year of 1907.

She carried 65,000 square feet of canvas, and had 30 yards on her five masts. The last time I saw her, or rather part of her, was 1914 on Xmas eve, when we passed her last resting-place on a trip from Stockholm to Baltimore. The noted marine photographer, K. G. Peterson, has the only original picture taken of her under full sail (which I know).

But in talking about ships, here is something of a mystery. In the latter part of 1919 I was in Quebec City looking for a berth going to England. I had a chance to make the trip to Glasgow in a schooner, *Marion G. Douglas* from Fox River, Nova Scotia. I just missed her by a hair and later I was glad I did, for she was found "With Not A Soul Aboard, Nor Even Found To Tell About It All."

Later in London, I saw a marine report stating that the islanders from Scilly Isles, in investigating a vessel riding strangely, found the three-masted schooner intact but unmanned. I have tried for some time to come to some sort of conclusion, but nothing doing. Now what do you old sailors around the Camp-Fire think of a happening like that in this century?

This is my first line to the Old Blaze, but I am sure it will not be the last one.—Charles O. Johanson.

AS TO the following letter, the photograph Mr. Walter kindly enclosed was a beautiful one and I wish we could reproduce it for Camp-Fire. I sent it on to Captain Dingle to see whether he could identify the five-master it showed.

I've written asking Mr. Walter why the German captain was so uncommunicative.

Pascaqoula, Mississippi.

I have been interested in the subject of five-masted ships which has been discussed at Camp-Fire. I enclose a photo of a five-masted ship which was brought to me by a German captain to have an enlargement made from it. The captain gives no information about it and other sailors to whom I have shown it say they have never seen one like it. One sea captain says there never was one built like it. Some think they recognize the German flag on it.

According to Captain Dingle's article in the last *Adventure* I would think this is the *Preussen.*—C. E. Walter.

And here's a letter from a comrade who has himself sailed aboard the *Preussen:*

San Quentin, California.

I see in *Adventure* of June 8th in "Camp-Fire" an article regarding six-masted vessels, and like to say that I know all of them and that they are all five-masters. I made one round trip on the *Preussen,* being a five-masted ship, now laying on the rocks off Dover, England. The *Rickmas,* a five-masted bark, the *La France,* a five-masted ship, and *Koebenhavn* a five-masted bark. I have only met one six-master, and that was the schooner *Sterling* of B. C. but there may be some more.—Avis Jenson.

EVEN though obliged to kill the surplus, the Canadian Government manages to keep over 10,000 buffalo in several of its national parks, according to a newspaper article sent us by H. C. Roache of Toronto. That is a better record than we have in this country.

SOMETHING from Post Sargent about Baron Trenck, the central figure in his article in this issue.

Baron Trenck fits in as a unique type. A certain amount of controversy has in the past raged about him, though he is practically forgotten today. From my own study of the records about him as well as what he himself has written, I am convinced that he was a victim, as many another great adventurer before and after him, of his adventurous spirit. Like so many of us, he lacked tact in handling situations and men. But this is not strange, when we consider that he was very young when brought into contact with numerous powerful personages of his times. He himself confesses to being hotheaded and proud, a not unnatural thing in a lad of noble birth, who had imbibed from birth the eighteenth century sense of the unassailable privileges of high rank.

Many another honest man has been caught in the net of this doctrine, to find too late that the doctrine works two ways; that one who is master over many ought not to overlook the fact that there is a hierarchy of power. And when one had Frederick the Great for master, one's individuality and one's own natural pride were liabilities rather than assets.

DESPITE the considerable study that has been made in the past twenty-five years, the eighteenth century is still only a half-opened book on the shelf of history. In the cross-currents of European and international politics, of national manners (what the French name inimitably *moeurs*), of nationalistic poses and contortions, of straightforward thinking in the pursuit of social ideals, of all the obvious characteristics that history can catalogue and expound, certain outstanding figures are carried along and seem to explain all the various drifts of the waters. Louis XV and Louis XVI; Frederick the Great; Catherine of Russia; Voltaire; Jean Jacques Rousseau; Mirabeau; Robespierre—and then Napoleon I, creation of both man's good and man's bad impulses for the preceding hundred years.

There are lesser figures that seem to be fighting the same fight of materialism vs. idealism, of fanaticism vs. tolerance, of orthodoxy vs. heterodoxy, of war-lust vs. peace (or war in a just cause), of personal ambitions vs. social amelioration. Of the champions of man: John Howard, prison philanthropist; Condorcet, convinced of man's ultimate progress; Robert Burns, poet of sincerity; Massillon, the priest; and myriad others.

But these were the personages, great and lesser, floating on the surface of events, indicating as I have said the battle of the currents. The eighteenth century will never be understood until the social hydrographers have tortured out the meaning of the *under-tows* of its history. Probably no writer of adventure's facts—as they touch Europe—ever understood this as well as Alexandre Dumas *père*, in his eighteenth century novels; especially well illustrated in "The Queen's Necklace," with its background figuring the great quack, Cagliostro. Backdoor history, if you will, that has produced so many of the "Secret Memoirs of—" of this period. Sometimes malodorous, but always interesting. Always revelatory of motivations that are only touched lightly upon by academic history. Freudian motives, it may well be; but Freud or Jung might perhaps have saved more than one throne, had they lived and been consulted.

In the "Affair of the Queen's Necklace," Cagliostro played an expert's part, as Rasputin played it one hundred and twenty-five years later in Russia. Should one look only to the broad lines of history, to the main currents of French politics and social disintegration, to explain Marie Antoinette's unpopularity and fall—and with her the dynasty of the Bourbons? Or must one look equally to boudoir politics, backstairs diplomacy, to the *under-tows* of brothel philosophism, to acquire a certainty of *all* the forces that fought on the side of social justice, of idealism, of racial prejudices, of unworthy ambitions?

"Intrigue" is a term we are rather hasty in using, to cover with a blanket indictment all these undertows of social relations. In general, yes! But, prejudice aside, there are many cases where the guilty as well as the innocent are sinned against. One sees this by following the tortuous course of the plots against Marie Antoinette in which she had no part, or knowledge, or fault.

TWO striking figures of romance were drawn into one of these plots. They are worthy of study, if one wishes to see with absolute clearness how the undertows finally affect the main currents of history. Read the life of that genius Beaumarchais, author of "The Marriage of Figaro," champion of American freedom before even Lafayette took a hand, watchmaker and musical inventor extraordinary, adventurer in search of the Queen's vanishing honor.

Then get down another book and determine for yourselves the identity of that other remarkable figure, the Chevalier d'Eon, with whom Beaumarchais carried on a strange contest for the possession of a casket that had the power to wreck the Queen's happiness and honor. Was the Chevalier d'Eon man or woman? Skilled swordsman, captain of a regiment, with feminine graces and characteristics and masculine pursuits.

Throughout the history of the eighteenth century one sees these secret clashing forces. Often the adventurer was the witting agent for good or evil of these forces. Often, carefree, indifferent to politics, he found himself the dazed and furious victim of his very indifference to the conventional values. Of the latter type was Baron Trenck. In the beginning, a youth of exceptional promise, drunk on the wine of life; in the end, disillusioned and a chaser of will-o'-the-wisps.

Caught in the under-tow, he probably never quite understood the force against which he struggled. His initial offence was one the enormity of which would never penetrate his mind—downright primitive in his reaction to impulses. He loved the sister of the King; he would marry her. Proud in the consciousness of a paladin's birth and strength, he saw no harm in such wooing.

From then on, the vast power of Frederick the Great was thrown against him. Had not Trenck's will and physical strength and audacity been what they were, it may well be that he would have ended his days a nameless, mysterious prisoner, held incommunicado. Another Man in the Iron Mask to torture human inquisitiveness.—POST SARGENT.

JUST in time to squeeze into this issue came the first cablegram from MacCreagh in Abyssinia. Its brief message, when decoded, was simply, "Received by Ras granted permission to explore," but that means that *Adventure's* Abyssinian Expedition has made its first objective and can enter upon the really exciting—and dangerous—work for which it set out. That means also that somewhere in the mails between here and East Africa there is an account, written by Mr. MacCreagh, of the earlier adventures of the expedition and of its immediate plans for action when it first takes to the field after leaving Adis Abeba. Just as soon as it can possibly be put into print that account will be passed on to you. Look for it some time this summer.

J. E. C.

OUR customary biographical sketch to let you get acquainted with the men who write our stories. This time it's Robert Carse.

He is white, married, a father, still under twenty-five, and born of the honest Scotch-Irish parents who were—and still are—possessed of strong Calvinistic leanings. Born in Riverdale-on-the-Hudson, and educated incoherently at such emporia of learning as the Hill School, Pottstown, Pa., the Horace Mann School, New York City, and several more elsewhere.

He stabbed straw-filled dummies in the R. O. T. C. and got himself an Expert Marksman's dingus, shooting 500 yards prone—and in numerous other postures—with a new Springfield-Enfield.

This form of hit-and-miss knowledge assimilation came to a long fore-doomed end in Evanston, Illinois, when he pulled out from under for good and went aboard the *James A. Farrell*, flagship of the well-known "tin-stack" fleet.

That fall, to deep water. A little over two years of it there. French Channel ports, and, much to his liking, the Mediterranean. Such unforgettable places as *Cafe Olympia, Cafe de Ferrari, Cafe Verdi*, in Genoa and many more, name and fame without end.

Heaved out of Torre d'Annunziata (Gulf of Naples) New Year's eve, 1921, bound for San Filiu de Guixol (Northern Spain) to load cork-ballast for home.

"We jammed our bow right into it, and for five days and nights, we had *si mucho* white water. We had no cargo; we had no ballast, and the only two things that hooker didn't do was shake hands with herself and sink. The second night, I believe it was, fourteen ships took the count right around us—eleven according to our 'Sparks'—and three we saw from the bridge at dawn. All we could do was stand there and curse.

"I've seen worse white water in the Western and the Eastern, but never such a howler as that, for suddenness, velocity and fierceness, keeping in mind, of course, the limited running-room of the Mediterranean."

That sort of cured him of his liking for *Mare Nostrum* and he picked a West Coast hooker—post-strike A. B.'s wage of $42.50 a month, two watches, no overtime, no nothing—and in such a manner became acquainted with *Mamie Kelley's* the *Strangers' Club* and sundry others of the Zone.

He got kind of badly sprung physically while on this West Coast run, and grabbed discharge, mate's and skipper's recommendations, and went in sick-bay, Marine Hospital Number Five, Port Townsend, Washington. He was well enough a couple of months later to see one of his old ships, the *Steel Engineer* (of the Isthmian Line) come up the road-bed, just in from Manila, after taking off five hundred refugees from the earthquake unpleasantness in Yokahama.

Due to the decency and recommendation of a former skipper, he caught ship (in the same line) for New York.

"She was a sweet, new freighter with a focsle full of square-head sailing-ship men—I was the youngest A. B. by about fifteen years—and a red-headed book-sailor skipper.

"Three days out of New York, a Sunday, we came to a more or less serious disagreement with him—entirely verbal and ethical. I had fully intended going up for my third mate's ticket in New York and staying on the sea.

"Instead, after being out of New York seven months, I hit the beach with five dollars, a deep loathing for a rufous-headed gentleman calling himself a skipper; and I never have gone back."

Three years in the newspaper business, two years in this fictioneering business and now his first novel is published, "Horizons," of which William McFee, a writer and a sailor of the first rank, says in part:

"The quality of Robert Carse's novel is indicated in the statement that he promises well for the future without reminding the reader very powerfully of any of his contemporaries. He is content with a conventional conclusion to an unconventional story. With excellent art he has made his sea-scenes quiet, natural and effective. They are true.

" 'Horizon' is Mr. Carse's first novel. It will not be the last."

J. E. C.

ASK *Adventure*

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Questions and Answers

Accurate Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere

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Verdicts by Experts on the Authenticity of Current Non-Fiction

Old Songs that Men have Sung

Collecting and Discussing Old Songs still Living among the People

Old Swords

A WEAPON with a wolf mark that was granted by an archduke to an armourer's guild five hundred years ago, and with a further mark to fix the manufacture as that of a bladesmith of renown—whose name is not known!

Request:—"For longer than I know of, there has been in our family a sword, two-edged, the hilt formed of two dog's heads, one of which appears to be of a bloodhound type and the other more of a deerhound type. Both faces of the sword are engraved, dated 1414, and with a fancy working of design including an animal, a staff of flags and a star on one side.

And so I am wondering if you can give me any information as to its probable source, authenticity, and use, and whether the emblems emblazoned thereon give any clew to the house in which it found service.

My own idea has rather been that it was used in hunting the deer and boar, and was probably of Germanic origin, though I have no special information on which to base the latter. As to its authenticity, I have no way of knowing. The emblazoning is well worn, and the blade and handle give the appearance of considerable age and use.

Any information in the above would be appreciated. If I can add any further points that might be of help, command me."—GEO. E. MUELLER, M.D., Oak Park, Ill.

Reply, by Mr. R. E. Gardner:—Your sword, of which you gave such a splendid description, is a weapon of the chase and dates from the early part of the 17th century.

The numerals 1414 which are engraved upon the ricasso bear no reference to that year but establish the fact that the blade was made by an Austrian bladesmith of Steyer during the first quarter of the 17th century. His work is well represented in the European museums. His name is not known.

The running wolf mark which you noted upon both sides of the blade is generally found on sword blades of Passau and Solingen. It was granted by Archduke Albert in 1349 to the amourer's guild at Passau and is also found on some of the earlier arms made at Solingen. It was also the personal mark of our bladesmith of Steyer so it became his common practice to engrave 1414, 1415 or even 1515 in combination with the running wolf mark upon blades of his make in order that his work might not be mistaken for that of the city of Passau.

The additional engraving upon the blade has no heraldic significance.

Telegraphy

OPPORTUNITIES for tropical operators are pretty poor. One needs to be a native and to have a knowledge of more than Morse to get a job in Porto Rico.

Request:—"Could you inform me if there are American owned railways in Cuba and Porto Rico operated by Americans that use the Morse code of telegraphy and use the American language in their train orders, and if so where I would have to write for information in regards to a position as telegraph operator? Also give, if you can, the same information in regards to Central America."—M. E. Long, Baileys Mills, Ohio.

Reply, by Mr. McNicol:—The old days when American Morse operators were employed in Mexico and South American countries is gone. There are a scattered few there yet, of course, but the Morse code is not much used. In Cuba and Porto Rico the telephone is largely used, and by native employees. When a fellow wants to roam nowadays he has to learn the Continental code and radio and take to the high seas. Of course, on some of the Western railroads you can still get a bit of adventure.

Ships

"I HEAR the iron bell break out the hours," says Bill Adams, and here is the method by which it marks the watches, as explained by an ex-skipper.

Request:—"I have been presented with a ship's clock which taps the bells instead of the hours, and having a 12 year old boy have been asked the why's and wherefore's of same until he has me stumped. So if you can tell me the following, accept my thanks in advance.

1. What was the origin of the bells?
2. How are the different chosen?
    a Oldtime ships?
    b Modern ships?
3. How long was the wheel watch—old and new?
4. How long was the deck watch—old and new?
5. What were the names of the different watches?"—A. E. Greenwood, Pleasantville, N. J.

Reply, by Capt. A. E. Dingle:—You omitted to send postage, but yours is such a plain, straightforward query that I am replying even though it breaks me.

Ship's bells originated in the days before clocks, when time was kept by means of a sand glass running half-hours. At sea, somebody always watched the sand glass and turned it immediately it ran out, striking a bell to announce that a half-hour had gone by. Watches of work were four hours each. Every two hours the helmsman was relieved. Hence, at the first half-hour, one bell was to be struck. At the hour, two bells, one for each turning of the glass. At the third half-hour, three bells, the first two struck in a pair to signify the full hour, and the one after a little pause. One hour and one half. Then another half-hour, completing two hours, so four bells, in two pairs. So on throughout until the four-hour watch was up, and eight half-hours had been noted. The bells started all over again with the new watch. So if you remember that a sea day started at noon for the sake of the old method of reckoning, the bells will be readily intelligible to you.

Your second query is not so clear. "How the different are chosen. 1, Oldtime ships; 2, Modern ships." You left out a word after different, I think, and I don't know what you mean. Come again on that one.

Wheel watch was usually two hours, and in most cases still is; though under certain circumstances of large crews, or unusual conditions of weather wheel tricks have been one hour only, and I have known men to stand full four-hour tricks. But the usual custom was and is two hours.

Deck watch also was usually four hours. Old style, four on and four off; in some ships the deck hands were allowed four on and eight off. In all modern steamers of any class at all the deck officers do four on and eight off; quartermasters the same in many cases, though last year I made a voyage in a cable steamer where there were only three quartermasters and they stood two hours on and four off, doing nothing but wheel duty.

Watches are: noon to 4 p.m. is called the afternoon watch; 4 to 6, the first dog watch; 6 to 8 p.m. the second dog; 8 to midnight, the first watch; midnight to 4 a.m., the middle watch; 4 a.m. to 8 a.m., the morning watch; and 8 a.m. to noon, the forenoon watch.

Come again if it's not all clear.

Sheep

RAISING rams in Oregon and Washington on money made by herding sheep for some one else means a hard grind for the greenhorn.

Request:—"Having noticed your name as an expert on the Northwestern States I would like to ask you for some general information on the sheep-raising industry.

I have a friend who herded sheep for his people in Utah for a long time, but he fell out at home and left. But he wants me to go to Washington or Oregon this fall and get a job herding for a while and save up till we can go in business for ourselves. He is very optimistic about the opportunities out there but I want the advice of a disinterested man.

We will have a few hundred dollars and a car and camping outfit.

Could you give me some information on what we would likely make herding for some one else? How long before we could start for ourselves and where could we find good grazing land? Is there any government land open for grazing suitable for us? Is the business profitable on the whole?"—Lyman Frazier, Anderson, Ind.

Reply, by Mr. Harriman:—Herding sheep in Washington is a very different matter from the same job down here in California. Here the herders have two burros to carry packs consisting of beds, food, extra clothing and the like. These burros are trained to follow the flock, which they do faithfully. Then they have two dogs apiece, which are worth more than three times as many men, rounding up the sheep, driving them anywhere directed, protecting them from coyote depredation, scaring cougar off and treeing them, giving the alarm if a bear approaches the flock.

In western Oregon the sheep are kept inside coyoteproof fences of netting. In eastern Oregon and Washington, it is all sagebrush land and the herder rides a horse and has his dogs to do the actual herding.

I do not know the present wage for a herder, but it was $50 a month a few years ago and later went to $75. This includes food, naturally. In some places, notably Wyoming, a herder often has a wagon and drives over the range, with his dogs taking care of the sheep.

As for your question regarding the profitableness of herding, you are just as well able as I am to figure what you can save from $900 a year. As for starting in sheep raising—it is foolish to try starting with less than five hundred ewes and ten bucks. Figure the ewes at $3 and the bucks at $25 and you have $1,750 in stock. Besides this you must have a home place to winter in, with feed to last the winter through, so add for forty acres land, half in alfalfa, a house, a barn, sheds, horses, tools, machinery, a little furniture, a reserve account for your food, clothes, medical treatment, etc.

The forty acres must be fenced, too.

With five hundred ewes you could count on about four hundred and fifty lambs the first year. Keep every ewe lamb and about five buck lambs, sell other buck lambs when fat and heavy in the fall. Kill no ewe lambs, for you need them to build up your flock. You must have a ram pasture, well fenced.

The sheep business pays when handled by experts, but a friend of mine living in St. Paul, lost $3,000 worth of sheep in one night. Blizzard in Montana. It is no snap, but calls for especial knowledge, watchfulness and judgment. Like every other kind of business except skunk trapping, a greenhorn is a handicap for the sheep business.

It would be very hard work to find any government land not in use. Sheep and cattle interests have filled the National Forests, so there is no room for new herds and flocks. The so-called desert lands are grazed to capacity in every state.

The best sheep deal I ever heard of here, was where a man stocked an island off our shore and offered a young man a percentage of lambs to take charge. The young fellow spent nine years on the island and then ferried a large flock to another island he had leased and started for himself, with the assurance that he could depend upon around $2,400 a year steady income from his sheep. By buying new bucks every two years, he kept his flock in fine shape and grew rich off it, as it increased in size until he ran forty thousand head in all, when he sold out. No such snaps at this time.

Some sheepmen whom I know went out of the business soon after the big war ended, but I never asked why, though one told me he lost money in 1919 and 1920.

Archery

HOW to back a lemonwood bow. There is nothing so good as the sinew that comes from the spine of a steer, even if it does take seven days to dry it.

Request:—"I am mighty glad to see that A.A. now covers archery.

I am buying a self lemonwood bow, 50″, plain ends, from Duff, but would like to back it. However, I am at somewhat of a loss to know what to use for the backing. I have a 70″ lemonwood made by Rounseville, backed with his patented fiber, and I have reason to believe that the fiber deadens the cast not a little. The same is said of rawhide—that it deadens the cast. I have never used it. Of the two, however, which would you advise?

Do you think it would be either possible or practical to make a back of hickory, carefully sandpapered and scraped to about 1/16 or 3/32 of an inch, and put it on without using clamps, using a strong muslin bandage instead? It is said of fiber and rawhide that they can be put on the back of a bow by bandaging. I am not enough of a carpenter or bowyer to know if this could be done with a thin piece of hardwood. Of course, using clamps on the rounded back of an already completed bow is pretty dangerous, and so out of the question."—R. S. Parrish, Savannah, Georgia.

Reply, by Mr. Powell:—"In regard to backing deadening the cast of a bow, as far as I have been able to learn both by experience and hearsay, there is only one thing used for a backing that will not slow up a bow and that is sinew. But unless you can get the large piece that extends the length of a steer's backbone and then can take a week off to dry it, lay off of sinew.

The next best thing in my opinion is calfskin rawhide as used by manufacturers of artificial limbs, as it is very tough and at the same time so thin that it does not appreciably check the speed of a bow. Fiber is not so good, but as it is cheap, easily obtained and easy to put on, as well as good-looking, it is used quite a lot. Hickory is fairly good, but if you could get a really good piece of elm, either rock or red elm, that is better. You can put on a wooden backing by either using clamps or carefully winding it together with cord, using heavy cord, winding it around the bow spirally about one and one-half inches apart all the way, taking care that wood comes as close together as you can get it, and using plenty of glue. Casein glue, made of milk and lime, is the best. It comes in a powder resembling malted milk and you should be able to obtain it from some wood-working establishment in your city as well as get instructions for mixing it.

It is hardly necessary to tell you that the wooden back of a bow should be carefully fitted to the bow. It will be practically impossible to sandpaper or scrape a wooden backing to a bow to fit. Use a plane or else better still take it to a cabinet shop and fit these together by planing to match with a joiner set to cut as light as you can.

For backing a bow already finished, I prefer rawhide. If there is anything else I can do for you, let me know.

THE following hints on walking trips have been printed in pamphlet form and may be obtained by applying to our hiking expert, Dr. Fordyce.

From a health standpoint there is no exercise which surpasses walking. It evenly exercises the muscles, especially those of the abdomen, which especially need development among people of a sedentary occupation, it speeds up elimination of waste products, it takes one out in the fresh air and sunshine and is easily within the scope of any one's daily activities. It is advisable to take at least a two-mile walk outdoors **"every day"** and if you can not do it during sunlight do it after supper. Then on week-ends and holidays or on the annual vacation longer walks may be taken into the wilderness near home or on long tours at a distance, or one may hit the trail into a real wilderness with much the same spirit as an explorer ventures out.

Proper equipment is more important on hike tours than on any other kind—comfort should be the big issue and equipment must be as light as possible. Equipment varies, depending on whether you are going where you can sleep at farm houses or hotels and buy your meals en route or whether you independently carry your shelter, mess kit, sleeping outfit and food far from a source of supplies. However the personal wearing equipment is much the same in both types of travel.

Personal Equipment.—Footwear is most important—wear next the feet lightweight, white silk socks and over them heavy wool socks reaching about to the knees, tucking the lower parts of the pants beneath them. The feet can be toughened by soaking daily in salt water. The best shoes for road or concrete are ankle high munson last (broad soled) army shoes with flexible soles and rubber heels; light-weight woolen union suits, army shirts, Stetson hat, army riding pants which do not bind at knee. Knife, purse, kerchief, matchbox in pockets.

Pack for Hike Trip Within Reach of Supplies and Stopping at Hotels or Farm or Ranch Houses at Night and Eating at Cafes.—A small knapsack with center point suspension of shoulder straps, containing amber goggles in case, cold cream, rain cape of balloon silk, extra socks, adhesive plaster, laxative, fly dope, kerchief, sweater, towel, soap, tooth-brush and shaving kit. Small cloth bag for lunch.

Pack for Trips into Wilderness With All Equipment Carried.—It is best for two people to go together and share the tent. Tent of balloon silk, 4 pounds; sleeping-bag of wool batts or feather-down folded over and sewed along bottom and three-quarter way up one side. Army or boy scout aluminum mess-kit with tin cup, a good pack sack of the Duluth type with head strap.

Hints for Knapsack Tours.—In equipping get your shoes at least a size larger than street shoes for the feet swell surprisingly on a long walk. The use of balloon silk items and dehydro foods is very important. Start with a pace of 3 miles an hour. Don't overdo. Watch the bowels—take laxative if needed. Bathe daily.—DR. CLYDE P. FORDYCE.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

The full list of experts will appear in the next issue. Besides geographical sections covering practically all of the world they handle the following topics: Salt and Fresh Water Fishing, Small Boating, Canoeing, Yachting, Motor Boating, Motor Camping, Motor Vehicles, All Shotguns, All Rifles, Edged Weapons, Firearms, Archery, First Aid on the Trail, Health Building Outdoors, Hiking, Camp Cooking, Mining and Prospecting, Forestry in the United States, Tropical Forestry, Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada, Aviation, Army Matters, Navy Matters, State Police, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Horses, Dogs, Photography, Linguistics and Ethnology, American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal, Herpetology, Entomology, Ornithology, Taxidermy, Stamps, Coins and Medals, Radio, Track, Tennis, Basketball, Bicycling, Swimming, Skating, Skiing and Snow-shoeing, Hockey, Boxing, Baseball, Football.

Old SONGS that Men have Sung

Conducted by R. W. GORDON

Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them. Although this department is conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and if each request is accompanied with self-addressed envelope and sufficient reply postage (not attached). Write to Mr. R. W. Gordon direct (*not* to the magazine), care of Adventure, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

THE best version I have yet seen of one of the favorite old plains songs came in not long ago from Oregon. Mr. W. S. Charles, who sent it in, tells in his letter something about the text and where he obtained it:

"I have heard snatches of this old song by old timers for years, but never was able to get it in total, in any form, until I met Mother Dorcas Lorana Hambleton, an old pioneer of Auburn mining days in Eastern Oregon. Her maiden name was Elliott. Her father was wagon master of a '48 wagon train which crossed the plains during Oregon Trail days. His name, I think, was William Elliott.

"Mother Hambleton is not sure of her own age. But she does remember, as a young girl, the hardships of that trip. This was the train from which the Sioux Indians took a young man and skinned him alive for the wanton killing of an inoffensive Sioux squaw.

"From Mother Hambleton's information the song was composed in 1861 or 1862. A member of their wagon train wrote it after their arrival at Pocahontas, Baker County, Oregon, a small pioneer settlement, now deserted."

Song of the Immigrant Trail

(*Text sent by Mr. W. S. Charles, Oregon.*)

I will sing you a song, e'en though a sad tale,
Of hardships we met on the immigrant trail,
When parting from kindred, our friends and our home,
We westward o'er valleys and mountains did roam.

They told us of Indians who harassed the plains,
The killing of drivers and burning of trains,
Of people they'd slaughtered with arrows and bow,
Of cruelties practised when striking the blow.

We crossed the Missouri and joined a long train
Which crawled slowly onward o'er boundless wide plain.
While rambling and traveling we ofttimes would go
To hunt antelope or the wild buffalo.

By short daily marches we reached the North Platte,
Made camp by its waters, a green shady flat,
There circled our wagons 'mid trees on a mound
And herded our oxen and horses around.

In the midst of our labor we heard a low wail,
The war-cry of Indians who followed our trail.
Men sprung to their rifles in flash of an eye,—
Exclaimed our bold leader, "We'll fight till we die!"

We drove in our cattle, made ready to fight,
As painted red devils dashed plainly in sight.
They charged on our wagons with fierce whoop and yell—
At crack of our rifles six red warriors fell!

We killed their bold leader at head of his band;
He died like a warrior, his bow in his hand.
A moment they halted when he fell to ground;
Then screeching with hatred they circled us round.

With trusty long rifles we gave them cold lead
Till many Sioux warriors lay on the ground dead.
They whooped and they hollered, then fled in dismay
With their chieftain's body when we won the day.

We had other combats; three brave men were slain
Defending their loved ones while crossing the plain.
We laid them at rest in a green shady dell—
Fond mem'ries there guard them—they fought true and well!

We traveled by day, guarded camp during night,
Till Oregon's mountains looked high in their might.
Now at Pocahontas beside a clear stream
Our journey is ended in Land of our Dream.

HERE is another pioneer song rather different in type, a song of a bold outlaw of Australia.

Bold Jack Donahoe

(*Text sent in by Mr. Charles E. Duffy, Port Alice, British Columbia.*)

Come all ye jolly bold rangers
  And outlaws of this land
Who wouldn't yield to government
  Nor live under slavery's band.
Attention pay to what I say,
  And value it if you do,
While I relate the matchless fate
  Of Bold Jack Donahoe.

In Dublin city of renown
  Was the very first breath he drew.
Being of good courage, stout and bold,
  They valued Donahoe!
He hadn't been but six short weeks
  On the Australian shore,
Till he took to rob on the King's highway,
  As he often done before.

He took to rob on the King's highway,
  We heard the people say,
They were afraid to go that road
  By either night or day!
And every week the newspapers
  Were filled with something new
Concerning this bold highwayman
  Whom they called Donahoe.

But Donahoe was taken
  In the middle of his prime,
And he was sentenced to be shot
  For an outrageous crime.
He left the police behind him,
  And several soldiers too,
Until the fatal day came round
  They lost Bold Donahoe.

As Donahoe and his comrade
  Rode out one afternoon,
Little was their notion
  They they were so near their doom.
Soon after him the horse police
  Well armed, hove in view,
And in quick time they did demand
  To take Bold Donahoe.

Says Donahoe to his comrade,
  "If you'll prove true to me,
We'll either fight until we die
  Or gain the victory!
Be of good courage, stout and bold,
  Be loyal, firm, and true,
For today we'll fight for victory!"
  Said Bold Jack Donahoe.

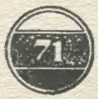
"Oh, no," said cowardly ——,
  "To that I won't agree.
Can't you but see there's nine of them
  Against just you and me.
And if we wait we'll be too late
  The battle we'll surely rue!"
"Begone from me, you cowardly whelp!"
  Said Bold Jack Donahoe.

Said the sergeant to brave Donahoe,
  "Lay down your car-a-bine.
Do you intend to fight with us
  And with us not resign?"
"To resign unto such cowardly dogs
  I never intend to do,
For I mean to fight for victory!"
  Said Bold Jack Donahoe.

The sergeant and the corporal
  They did their men divide;
Five rounds were fired into the front,
  Four of them on the side.
Nine rounds were fired by the police
  Before the fatal ball
Which pierced the heart of Donahoe
  And caused him for to fall.

MANY more old pioneer and outlaw songs are wanted. Who can send them in?

SEND all contributions of old songs, and all requests for copies of them, direct to R. W. GORDON, care of *Adventure*, Spring & Macdougal Streets, New York City.



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Books You Can Believe—Verdicts of our experts on non-fiction books appear in alternate issues.

Lost Trails—This department for finding missing friends and relatives is printed only in alternate issues.

The Trail *Ahead*

The next issue of ADVENTURE, *June 1st*

Two *Complete Novelettes:*

On the Skyliner

By Thomson Burtis

His name was *Eric Montague St. John;* he wore pince-nez, dressed like a lord and, when he condescended to talk, used an Oxford accent. *Lieutenant "Slim" Evans* of the Border Air Patrol met him in the clouds and wondered why the Englishman's plane mounted two guns and seemed to be in such a terrific hurry to get to Mexico.

Green Jade

By W. Townend

The young ship's officer was souvenir hunting in the port of Lisbon. Now likely souvenirs are scarce in Lisbon, but red-haired girls are scarcer, so *Mr. Rotherwick*, having crossed the path of the young lady twice that day, decided to divide his attention between the two.

Part Four of Wastrel

Gordon Young's New Serial *of Dan McGuire in the South Seas*

Part Three of A New Found World

A Novel *of Old Iceland* by Roger Pocock

The Drums Roll

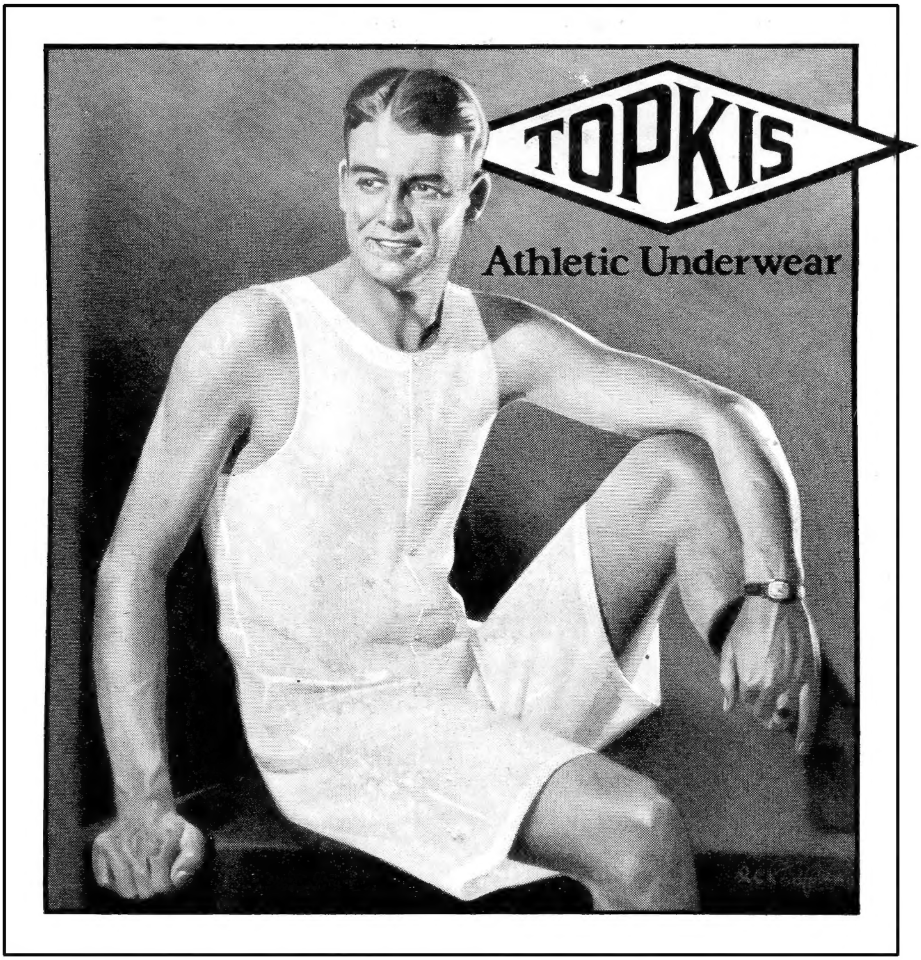
By Ernest Haycox

His uniform was quite as dilapidated as that of any man in the army General Washington was massing at Germantown to check Lord Howe, yet from *Parcel's* manner *Barkeloo* suspected he was more familiar with the sword than the rifle, that he was a man more used to command rather than to obey. And how did he come by that mysterious wound in his leg? *Barkeloo* would watch him.

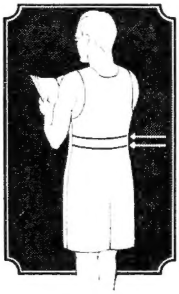
And—*Other Good Stories*

Red Symbols, by Harry Huse, *an Indian doughboy returns;* Three From the Deck, by Edward L. McKenna, *gratitude among gunmen;* The Dedwood Coach Brakes Down, *letters of a wandering partner*, by Alan LeMay

Adventure is out on the 1st and 15th of the month



Millions of Men *Buying* Dollar Topkis



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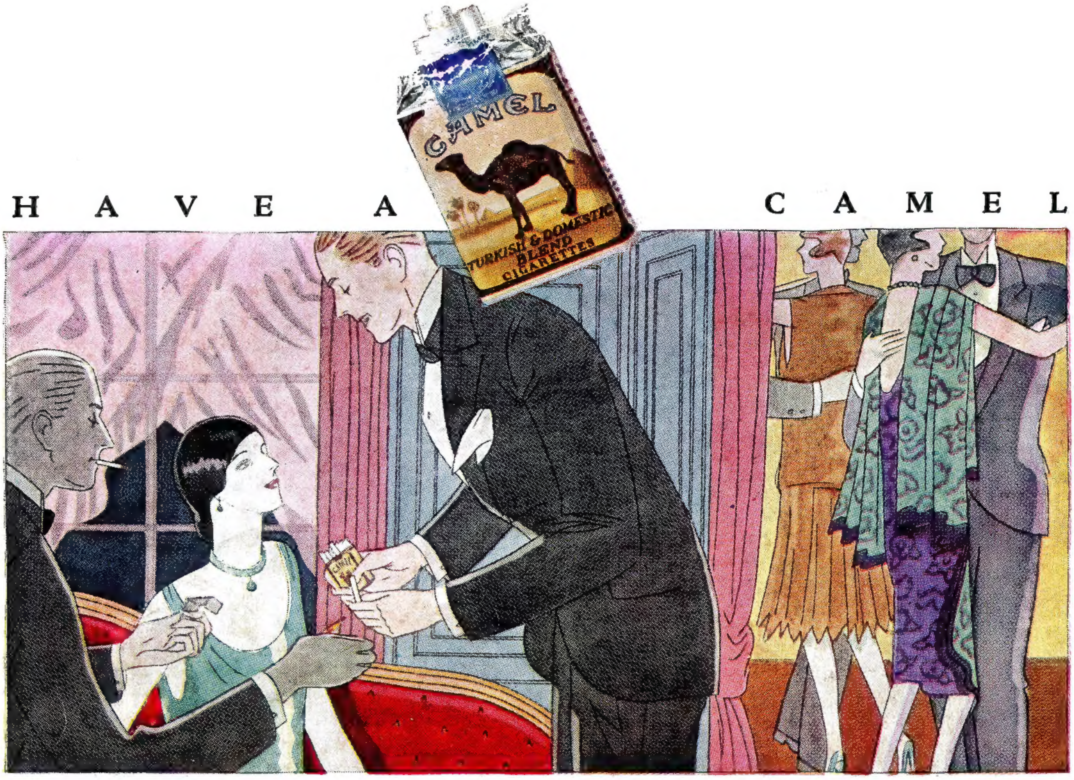
AT THE TOP OF UNDERWEAR FAME STANDS THE TOPKIS NAME



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